

The Silver and the Gold

By Cindy Rae



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*Love keeps the stars in the firmament and imposes rhythm on the
ocean tides.*

*Each of us is created of it, and I suspect each of us was created
for it.*

Maya Angelou

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For Winterfest, 2016

"What year will this be? More than twenty, I know." She was seated at her vanity, clustered candlelight flickering, gently.

Vincent did some mental calculations as he fastened his vest. "Mmm. Twenty six. Or seven. Close to it."

"It's hard to keep track. I missed one. Or two." She dabbed perfume on her wrist. Diffusion made their room smell like roses.

"Considering you were in labor once, I think everyone understood, Catherine." He dropped a kiss on top of her head as he tugged the cuffs of his white shirt forward.

"I want Jacob to dance with me."

"Which one?" he asked, selecting a belt the color of warm caramel.

"Both. And I won't take 'no' for an answer, from either of them," Catherine said, referring to both her son and her father-in-law. Her salon styled hair lay in long, soft layers around her fair face, and she brushed the ends, lightly.

"Father wouldn't dream of refusing you, though he may be slow. And your son will be ... honored."

"You did send word?" she raised a still perfectly arched eyebrow.

"And received a reply," Vincent patted his pocket. "And what is good for the beautiful goose is good for the gander. If you are dancing with Jacob, I must choose which of my two lovely daughters will waltz with me. Jake says he will bring them. No need to worry," he soothed his love.

"Your dance card will be full," she smiled, adjusting a pair of dangling pearl earrings. He swore her reflection in the old oval mirror looked

lovelier each year. Catherine, in turn, simply teased that age was making him increasingly near-sighted.

"And I will always only long for my wife to agree to dance with me." He helped her fasten the clasp on her crystal necklace as she held the stone, in front. Her manicurist had set a pretty little white sequin in the crescent nail of her ring finger. He liked it. It looked ... festive.

"Do you think we'll close the place down?" Her reflection asked as he finished. She dropped her hand and they both watched his crystal settle at the cleft of her breasts.

"I can think of no reason why this year should be different." He turned away, lest the image of her distract him and lead to something else.

"Have you seen the cuff links Caroline gave me for my birth- ah. There they are," he said, locating the wayward jewelry on top of his wardrobe.

Catherine rose and helped him fasten the cuffs to his shirt. The initial "V" was engraved on one, and "C" on the other. They glimmered golden, in the candlelight.

"These are very impressive," Catherine complimented their daughter's gift to her father.

"Private practice has its advantages, as you so regularly assured me. Joe is coming?"

"With the whole family in tow. I think he's bringing a lasagna." She smoothed her skirt.

"William will put it at the back of the table."

"Jenny will just move it forward."

"And we'll all get to watch them play 'move the lasagna dish,' all evening. Again."

Catherine smiled that it was true. "MaryBeth loves Joe's mother's lasagna," she said, naming Caroline's twin. "She'll stand by him. Plus she said she's craving Italian."

He embraced his beautiful wife as her long white hem swirled around her delicate ankles. "Nervous about becoming a grandmother?" he asked.

Catherine shook her sandy head, silver threads dancing among the honey. "No. Not nervous. Happy. So happy, Vincent. Parents, then grandparents. Things I was never sure would happen for us."

"Eric says she wants the den re-painted. Again. And their chamber enlarged."

"I think we are definitely at that stage where what MaryBeth wants, she's likely to get," Catherine smiled.

She collected her wrap, settling it high on her shoulders. A lovely white coat went on overtop of it.

"Well, I'm going."

"Let me tie my cravat and we can walk to the Great Hall, together." He raised his neck and began to wrestle with the white neck cloth.

Again, her eyebrow raised. Her hands went to her hips, only somewhat changed after two pregnancies, three children, and more than twenty years.

"No."

"Catherine, surely this year..."

"Not a chance. I'll be waiting."

"But, Catherine," He began a protest he never got a chance to finish.

"Vincent. We can't. And I can't go to Winterfest any other way."

"I didn't think I'd have t-"

"Well you do." She waggled her fingers "good-bye."

He tilted his head in a way that was utterly familiar to her. "Do you mean to tell me you'd really miss Winterfest?"

"I'd have to." Her none was implacable.

"I'm no longer a young man, you know." He pled age. Mostly because it was easier than pleading insanity. Which he thought this was, on her part.

"Oh, I don't know," she tilted her own head and regarded his long, muscular frame.

"You might have lost a step, but I don't think it's that bad."

"Lost a step?" Now it was his eyebrow that went ceilingward. It was as arched as the stained glass window at his back.

"It's a football expression. It means you're a little slo-"

"I know what it means." he said, a bit shortly.

"Well. I'll see you there, then."

With a swish of her white skirt, she was gone.

"Lost a step. Lost a step? I have not lost a step," Vincent insisted to the now empty room. Yes, there were touches of silver mixed in with the gold of his beard, and some of the lines on his face had deepened. But lost a step? *Hardly*, he thought loudly.

He grumbled a bit as he finished tying his cravat, then donned his cape. Not the new one, not the one MaryBeth had made him for their anniversary, but the old one. The original. The one he insisted he could never part with, and Catherine never wanted him to.

It settled around his shoulders like the dearest of old friends, and he collected what little else he needed then went on his way.

Stubborn. Intractable. Superstitious. Resistant to change, the words scrolled through his head.

Beautiful. Beautiful but stubborn. Incandescent, at times. And utterly obstinate. He knew every word was true. It was her obstinacy that had convinced him into fatherhood, a second - which also turned out to be a third time, when their twin daughters had been conceived.

Obstinate. Constant. Shimmering.

The winking gold at his cuffs caught his eye. "Like gold," the husky voice whispered, as he emerged from the drainage culvert. He sprinted across the greensward to the tree line that followed the path to her apartment building.

"There is no good reason for this," he muttered, reaching the fire escape ladder just as late evening began to deepen to night.

"None whatsoever," he commented as he rose, the old metal feeling marvelously familiar, beneath his hands.

The low, ringing sound of his boots on the steps sounded almost nostalgic, like a song he'd heard long ago, and forgotten, until just now. He wondered if he would ever grow tired of hearing it, and knew that he wouldn't.

Of all the stubborn, ill conceived...

A soft moon marked his progress up the ladder, and then across the top of her roof. He walked light-footed to the edge, remembering the first time he'd ever done it.

There had been a soft glow of lamplight shining from her bedroom, and he'd seen it, had sensed her inside, working. Their bond had been so new, and he remembered it that night, whispering, across his consciousness. It had been late, then. Very late. Very late, for their Topside beginning.

He'd walked across the area above her balcony and dropped down near the living room rather than near the bedroom, thinking to set down Great Expectations and then leave. But the cape he now wore had swung wide on the turn, and he'd bumped one of the iron chairs, accidentally. Accidentally on purpose, perhaps. To this day, he'd never been sure.

No matter. It had only changed his fate, utterly. And hers.

And so Catherine, of course, had insisted that a chair always remain on the balcony, amid the ivy and the roses. "Just for luck," she insisted.

He eyed the empty chair now, from Above, knowing she was waiting inside the apartment. He could feel her there.

In his thirties, the drop to the stone firmament was an inconsequential decent. Now, in his fifties, near to sixty...

"Lost a step, have I?" he sneered it under his breath. He'd show her "lost a step."

With the feline grace that still marked his days, Vincent dropped to her terrace, the place where they'd begun in earnest, if all but accidentally. He knew the drop had been a nearly soundless one, barring his small grunt as he'd made contact with the concrete. If he twisted his knee, he knew he'd make a hideous dance partner. *But she insisted...*

He straightened and stood back from the darkened living room doors. She hadn't bothered with the lights, but they both knew she was in there. He folded his hands in front of him, the long cuffs half covering the backs of his gloves, the dark cape enveloping him like a precious secret. He stared at the glass paned doors, willing her to appear, to sense he was there, and waiting for her.

After 28 years of togetherness and three children, she'd become far more sensitive to their bond, not to mention that she was expecting him. Though if history was any guide, she'd pretend that she wasn't.

After a long minute, she opened the door, peeked around it and instructed: "You have to knock."

"You already know I'm here," he pointed out.

"You still have to knock. Don't jinx it, Vincent." She moved to close the door.

"We're going to be late," he chafed.

The door swung out, a little, again. "Then you'd better knock, so we can get going. Because until you lift the beam off that door, nobody's dancing with anybody." She shot him a smile as she said it, still proud that his amazing shoulders could lift the enormous weight of the beam that held the doors closed.

"Maybe they'll get someone else to do it. Since I've 'lost a step.'" he tossed the offending phrase back to her.

"Oh for goodness sake. You're not annoyed with me about that, are you?" She remained peeking around the door which led into the now all-but-deserted apartment. The children used it, from time to time, or Catherine found some excuse to return to it to do more than water the roses or make a few phone calls, and they always spent their anniversary here, of course. But some months, the place had a distinctly un-lived in feel.

As her closest friends had come to understand more about her life, and as other changes had taken hold, she'd remained a woman of two worlds, but stepped between them as she chose. They'd raised their children to do the same. Time spent in each place depended largely on what any of them was doing, at the moment.

Vincent decided to let his love twist in the January wind, a little. "Me? Annoyed? I'm trying to decide. You may have to make it up to me." He stated with the authoritative air of a man who knows he is well-

loved, and possessed of a wife who would do almost anything to please him.

"Not until you knock," she prompted. She shut the door on him, and Vincent had occasion to remember that he'd married a very single-minded lawyer. And that "almost" was a qualifying word.

Stepping up to the squares of wood and glass, he let her stew a few seconds longer than necessary, before he raised a gloved hand, and gently, very gently, rapped on the pane.

Letting him stew right back, she waited a before she opened it again, pushing the door out so that the January air could drift into the place she used to live.

"Why, Vincent. How good it is to see you," she chimed, smiling her loveliest smile. *Was there anything he wouldn't do for that smile, even though it was given in pretense, right now?* He utterly doubted it.

"Good evening... Catherine." He dropped his voice low, and let the low baritone caress her name, as it had for decades. "You look... very beautiful, this evening." He said it with sincerity, and plucked her hand off the door handle, so he could plant a soft kiss on the back of her simple gold wedding band. He covered her hand with his, and warmed it, as his breath traced the area above her knuckle. He felt her shiver, and knew it wasn't from the chill air. Her sequin winked at him.

"Th-thank you," she replied, her tone not quite as composed as she wanted to pretend it to be. He kissed the ring finger again, and brushed the mouth she loved across the tip of her longest finger,

before he released her. The bond jumped a little, between them, and he knew she knew he knew it. He tried to hide his smile.

"I...I... did you have something for me?" she stammered, hating that he could still shatter her composure with the simplest of kisses. They were about to be grandparents, together. At least she could act unfazed by a simple greeting.

Delighted at the stutter in her voice he reached inside his cape pocket, bringing forth what she desired.

"There is a very great celebration Below." He stepped closer to her, well within her personal bubble. "A... special time. Winterfest. Where we remember the past, and look to the future. And ... everyone ..." He adored her green eyes, which looked positively luminous, in the moonlight, "...absolutely everyone, agrees that it would be incomplete, if you weren't there."

They were close to the words he'd given her the first time he'd ever invited her to Winterfest. Picking up the hand he'd kissed, he put the long, gradient, red and orange Winterfest candle into it. Gently, he closed her fingers around it, keeping his hands over hers.

He was inviting her to Winterfest. Just as he'd done, their first time.

"I'd be ... honored to come," Catherine said, not playing now, but fighting another catch, in her voice. She meant it. She'd always meant it.

"Then I'll be happy to escort you," he answered, aware her mood had changed at the touch of his lips, if not that of the symbolic wax.

Winterfest. And once again, Rebecca's candles were lovelier than ever.

"I'll meet you at your basement, then," Vincent said, aware that the hour was growing later. They really did need to get going, so that the festivities could begin. He stepped away from her, preparing to make the climb back up to her roof, so he could ride the elevator down.

"I... Vincent?" she asked, her voice full of love, and a question. It stopped him in his tracks, as it had done for many years.

"Yes, Catherine?" he turned to her.

The moon held her shadow-framed visage in its soft light, and a lone tear of uncertainty made its way down a face that was no longer quite as unlined as it has once been, but was still far lovelier, in his opinion, for that.

"Would you come here, please?" Her voice was a breathless whisper, on the winter wind.

He was to her in two long strides, and had her in his arms almost before she threw herself there. Her kiss, when it came, was full of the glory of their marriage, of their parenthood together, of the coming change that lay before them, and of much that had happened, in the past. He could feel it, inside her, and tasted it all as a flavor, on his tongue.

"Here then, what's this?" he asked, touching his gloved hand to her tear.

"I... I don't know. I guess... You don't think this is silly, do you? Me asking you to climb way up here each year, to bring me a candle?"

He did, but for the world, he wouldn't say it to her.

"I think it is something you enjoy. And it has always been true that you give too much, and ask for too little," he dodged, deftly. A quarter century of marriage had taught him a few things, after all.

Worry lined her forehead. "It's just... this year the baby comes, and I... I don't want to do anything to tempt fate. To bring us bad luck."

He dropped his arms so that he cradled her waist, and tugged her firmly against him, letting her feel his strength. "MaryBeth is fine. Caroline is fine. And we are fine. And the baby will be fine. You'll see, Catherine. All will be well." His love was feeling vulnerable. It was a feeling he recognized, but not one he'd felt from her in quite some time.

"I know. It's just..." she turned her head and laid her cheek against his heartbeat, the only pillow she ever craved. "It's just... we're so blessed, Vincent," she said it to the night breeze, and the folds of his cape, as he drew them around her. He settled his weight and let her feel the bulwark of his presence.

"We are. We are that, my love." He rocked against her, gently, letting her feel him surround her, cloth and man.

"I know we should go," she said, trying to collect herself, aware of the ticking of the clock.

"Not yet," he demurred. "I don't take advantage of holding you here in the moonlight as often as I used to." He kept her there, knowing she still needed to be held close. He felt as much as heard her grateful sigh, as she leaned in against him.

After a moment: "Remember the first night we spent here?" she asked, needing the strength the memories gave her.

"Like it was carved in stone," he assured her. "I think I replayed everything you said that night, and what I said back, for days, afterwards." He kissed the crown her head, the gesture having lost none of its poignancy, to time.

"You wanted to see if I was well," she smiled, and he heard the catch in her voice as another tear fell.

"And you read me the last chapter of Great Expectations." His soft voice rumbled, heavy with memory.

"You bumped a chair," she smiled.

"And you came out of your room with a loaded gun." He returned her smile with one of his own.

She stepped back and brushed her tear streaked face with her free hand, a wry smile still there. "It's a wonder I didn't shoot you, and end us before we started," she said.

He chuckled softly at that, and let her ease back, a little more. "It might have been interesting. I could have recovered in your bed, and we might have got ourselves sorted that much sooner."

She clapped her hand over her mouth to stop the laughter that wanted to burst out at that image.

How could he do that? How could he take her from tears to laughter, so quickly? How could he make her smile, brush any fear away, so easily, after all these years?

"Because it's been 'all these years,'" he said, hearing the thoughts as if she'd said them aloud. It was a thing that almost never happened. But sometimes...

"Father would have had a fit," she suddenly felt quite taken with the idea of him in her big bed, with a bandage around him somewhere, healing, unable to leave her rooms.

Vincent leaned closer. "And I would have been insufferably... happy," he said, planting a gentle kiss on her forehead.

"You missed," she whispered, being careful to not break the candle as she brought her arm up around his huge neck, bringing his mouth down for another kiss.

It was warm, and full. Full of all she was, and all they were together.

"Maybe we should just stay here," he decided, moving her body gently, as if they were dancing. "Tell them all to go hang."

"We can't do that," Catherine chided softly, putting her hand up in a waltzer's pose, anyway.

"We can do anything we want. And I am dancing with my wife."

"We can do anything we want?" When was the first time he'd said that? And the first time he believed it? Was it the day she'd told him she was pregnant with the girls, and staring at her flat stomach, he'd told her there were two? After that? Before it?

She didn't remember. But she knew it was an attitude he utterly believed now. It was no longer a matter of "if" they would do a thing.

It was a matter of "how." Once the question had changed, everything else just seemed to fall into place.

He swayed with her to music only they could hear.

"They're going to send someone to come look for us, if we don't..."

"We'll lock the doors and leave the lights turned out. Light the candle, and stay here until it's burned low," he teased. Or at least she thought he was teasing. Years of pushing limits had made Vincent very good at that, and he'd always been just a touch reckless, about it.

"Or we could go down and join them," she prompted. "Our family. Our friends. We're going to be grandparents, Vincent." The sentence both delighted and awed her.

"No, we are going to be magnificent grandparents. And by this time next year," he added.

"Will you bring the baby a candle? His first one?"

"Her first one. And of course I will. And you and I will argue, over who gets to dance with her, first."

"I think MaryBeth and Eric will have something to say about that," Catherine adored the image he was painting.

"And I think they will bow to the wisdom of their elders," he said. Then he stopped moving, and held her green eyes in the blue of his. Lines fanned out from the corners of his eyes, enhancing their feline tilt. She still felt she could drown in those eyes, a quarter of a century and more, after she'd first beheld them in the reflector of a headlamp. *A headlamp I threw at him*, she recalled.

His low voice was a deep purr of seductive contentment. "Or if they don't bow to wisdom, they should at the very least bow to the wishes of the most... incandescently beautiful woman on the planet. I know I always have." He stroked her loose hair backward, threading it between his gloved fingers, and cupped the back of her head, placing a loving kiss on the tip of her nose. It was cold.

"Love you," she said.

"And I love you," he answered.

Catherine sighed, having no words for this level of happiness.

"Well, if they're going to listen to us, I suppose we'd better get going," she said, tugging the coat closer around her. He made her warm, and conversely, it heightened her sense of the chill air, around them.

"I'll meet you," he promised, stepping away, nimbly.

"Vincent?" she asked. He stopped again. They were getting later by the minute.

"Before there's an audience, before there's ... everyone... would you say it?"

"Say ... 'it?'" he asked.

"You know," she prompted, holding up the candle as a reminder.

She was bathed in moonlight, his gold band on her finger, her hair lightly touched with silver, which the moon picked up, and played in.

Say it? Oh.

He held out one, huge, hand. A steady hand. The one that bore his own wedding ring, beneath the glove, the one that had carried her, helped to save her life, caught her children, the day they'd been born, built their home, built their world, kept her safe. He kept it outstretched.

His voice was an amber candle flame. "May I lead you through the dark, Catherine?"

She answered with the strength of her convictions, as she placed her much smaller hand in his, one more time.

"There is ... no darkness, Vincent," Her voice rang with surety, "... when you are with me."



Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination, full of hope. – Maya Angelou

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For the Renaissance Girls

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

