

LEGACY

by A.N.D.

(from Destiny Three)

Vincent peered impatiently through the clutter in Father's study to catch a glimpse of the antique clock. To his great displeasure, it read a mere 4:45, impudently claiming that only three minutes had passed during the hour he'd just spent pacing in and out of the library alcoves. He gave it a short snarl in warning not to try that trick again and flung himself back into the library to begin more pacing. It just had to be 7:00 soon! The sun wouldn't set until then, so he couldn't see Catherine until then. Didn't that clock understand? She needed him.

She'd told him so last night as they parted. She hadn't spoken much as they walked hand-in-hand through the crisp fall evening in the park, but he could feel sorrow, fear, and resignation rolling in her emotions, until finally, as they hugged goodbye outside the drainage pipe, there came from her a strong sense of resolution.

"Vincent," she asked, handing him a slip of paper, "is there a tunnel entrance near Sutton Place? Could you meet me here tomorrow night?"

Foolish question. As if he wouldn't gladly come to meet her anywhere she asked, any time she asked. If there hadn't already been an entrance near the address she listed, he'd have told her there was and then spent all day making one.

"Of course," he told her softly. "What do you need, Catherine?"

"Your help bringing some things to the tunnels. I have some... odds and ends you might be able to use."

"I hope you remember to remove the price tags this time," he teased, hoping to lighten her mood, but grief smashed through him from the bond and he saw the glint of a tear, before Catherine blinked and composed herself.

"I'm sorry," he breathed, completely at a loss as to what he'd said wrong.

"It's all right, Vincent. But I doubt there are any price tags I'll have to remove." She took a deep breath. "I'm breaking up my father's house."

Catherine had learned to do many hard things in the last few years and had discovered more courage in herself than she ever knew she had. But walking through her father's door that morning, knowing that she'd come to parcel his life out among people who hadn't known him, was the hardest thing she had ever done.

At first she'd simply wandered through the rooms, remembering. A faint orangey spot on the carpet, well-washed but never quite eradicated, was where she had dropped a plate of spaghetti when she was six. How upset she'd been, and how understanding Mother and Dad had been...The neatly framed portrait of her parent's wedding day, never moved, always right there...The worn antique rocking chair, which one childhood day she'd rocked so hard that it fell over backwards. Dad had

helped her disentangle herself, but there was still a deep gouge on the back of the chair... The marble-topped end table she'd given her father as his birthday present three years ago...

The thought of packing it all away was overwhelming, but just as Catherine was giving in to tears for the futility of it all, she felt Vincent's concern flowing through their bond. He was waiting to come to her, and her sorrow was hurting him. That mustn't continue. Catherine took a firm grip on the thought of how much it would mean to the tunnel people to receive warm, whole clothing and sturdy furniture that didn't require repairing - and how much it would have meant to her father to know that these things were being given to people who deserved them. She rolled up the sleeves of her sweatshirt and waded in.

By the time night had fallen, Catherine was through with the easy part. She had packed up all the things she knew she wouldn't be wanting, like his clothing and toiletries. All the furniture she couldn't move into her apartment was tagged for relocation Below; the entire contents of his first aid kit were in a box marked specifically for Father. Likewise, she'd set aside all the things she knew she was keeping: her parent's wedding picture, photo albums and family records, the marble-top table.

Vincent came to her just as she was starting in on the most difficult part: The sentimental things, the ones she wasn't sure whether she wanted to keep or not. Catherine was so absorbed in her decision-making she didn't realize he had arrived. He watched her from behind as she turned a vase over and over in her hands before sighing and placing it gently in a box marked "Tunnels".

Without looking up, she reached over to a pile of assorted things and picked up a box. She spent a moment tracing the inlaid pattern on its lid, then opened it: A Bach cantata tinkled softly, swelling to full harmony as Catherine set the music box down.

"Vincent would love this," he heard her murmur. As the tune wound to its end, Catherine gently closed the lid, hesitated, then set it in a box marked "Apartment".

"It's a lovely tune," Vincent said quietly.

Catherine jumped, twisting to look behind her. "Vincent! Oh, you've come, you're here..." Her voice was filled with relief, but then trailed off as she gave a guilty glance to the music box. "I was just..."

Vincent gently gripped her chin, forcing her eyes back up to meet his. "It's something special to you, isn't it?"

She nodded. "Dad's engagement gift to Mother."

"Catherine," he whispered softly, "keeping for yourself a token of your parent's love is not shameful. I know that you don't love me the less for not giving it to me."

She smiled then and he smiled back, wrapping her in the warm reassuring hug he'd been needing to give her all day. Catherine snuggled close, basking in his nearness, his life. It had been somewhat disturbing to be the only living thing left in a dead man's house, even if it was the house where she'd grown up, but now Vincent was here and everything was all right again. Vincent always made everything all right, just like- Just like Daddy had...

With a final squeeze Catherine stepped back, taking Vincent's hand and urging him to join her at the haphazard pile of belongings. Vincent reached out and picked up a marble bookend shaped like half of a broken classical column. Catherine rooted for a moment and pulled out the other half; he fitted them together, then looked at her.

"Father would love these," he commented neutrally.

"They were given to Daddy by his father as a reward for passing the bar," Catherine said, looking at

them. Vincent started to put them in the box set aside for her things, but she laid a hand on his arm to stop him. "No, wait-

"But they have great meaning for you."

"Vincent, it's my father for whom these things had great meaning. What I'm trying to decide is what also has great meaning for me. I can't keep everything, you know." Catherine gnawed on her lower lip as she stared reflectively at the bookends. All at once, it was too much.

"I hate this!" she burst out. "In my heart I don't really want those bookends. They're nice but I have no room for them, yet- they were one of Daddy's prized possessions and I feel like I'm being a bad daughter for even thinking of giving them away!"

"Perhaps you should choose someone specific to give them to," Vincent suggested. "Give them to Father and be sure to tell him their story. Then he can prize them for their value, as well as their beauty, and the memory of your father will be kept alive and shared, even by those who did not know him."

"Tell us their stories, Catherine," he continued. "Share more than what these things are, share what they mean." Her threatened tears subsided and she nodded, knowing he was right.

Her tiredness faded as they began the task together.

They worked very late into the night, making careful decisions about each precious, tangible memory: Mary was to receive the quilts made by Catherine's great-grandmother, frayed by moths and age beyond Catherine's meager skills to repair; Mary's talented needle was all that was needed to restore their old beauty. In the same vein, Mouse was to get the chime clock which no longer kept time but had been a first anniversary present. Michael was to be given the typewriter that had been Charles Chandler's all through law school; William was to be offered the entire set of copper-bottomed pans left from the housewarming of the newlyweds' first home.

They went through the stack item by item and Catherine shared with Vincent the complete story of each heirloom and they decided together who would be best to keep the memory of each one alive. Almost the last thing was a black dress, but when Vincent picked it up, Catherine's look turned deliberately blank.

"I don't know how that got into this pile. It belongs with the rest of the clothing going Below," she said levelly, but Vincent could sense the turmoil beneath her expressionless face. He could smell traces of Catherine's perfume in the lace, mingling with an older, more delicate scent. When she reached for it, he did not let it go.

"Was this your mother's?" he asked, guessing.

"Yes. She was wearing a black lace dress when Daddy met her, so he insisted that she always have one in her closet." Again Catherine tugged, but Vincent still refused to open his hand.

"But you have worn this." It was not a question.

"Yes." Catherine was avoiding his eyes as she pulled again. Another failure produced a longer explanation. "Daddy kept it for me when Mother died. He said he hoped that if I wore it to parties, I might catch the eye of someone who would make me as happy as they were together."

Catherine's face was turned obstinately away, but Vincent saw the glitter of a tear tracing down down her cheek.

"Did you ever wear it to parties?" he asked gently, trying to root out the source of the sorrow she

wasn't admitting.

"I wore it to his **funeral!**" she wailed, suddenly yanking so hard that the dress was literally torn out of his hands. She wadded it up into a ball and threw it across the room towards the boxes of clothing. "Mother is dead! Daddy is dead! Don't you see?"

"No," Vincent answered honestly. He gathered Catherine into his arms, cradling her head against his shoulder as she sobbed, her exhaustion, both physical and emotional, all but complete. "I felt the warmth of your memories when you looked at the other things. Why does this dress hurt you so?"

"Because...b-be-cau-cause..." Catherine sniffled into his vest and tried again. "Because the day Daddy gave it to me, he told me the story behind it and why it was his favorite dress of hers. And he told me he wanted to see me wearing it and having fun, just like Mother the day he met her."

"And...", Vincent coaxed when she paused.

"Do you know what party I last wore that dress to? My father's **wake!** It had meant so much to him that I felt I should wear it in his memory, but when I went to put it back in my closet, all I could think of was that now Daddy would never be able to see me in it again. Ever. And now I can't even look at it, without being reminded that he's gone."

Vincent nodded his understanding, and let the matter rest. When Catherine was calmer they finished the job of packing, working quietly and quickly.

Most of the boxes were left behind until arrangements could be made to bring them down, and when they were brought, the unexpected bounty of clothing, food, supplies and furniture was the talk of the tunnels for days. Those Below were so involved in exclaiming over Catherine's generosity and in sharing out the pieces, that they had no time left to wonder what it was that Vincent had scooped out of one of the cartons and hidden beneath his cloak before disappearing from the crowd.

Catherine found herself turning more and more to the Tunnel society after that night, accepting it as her new family, to replace the one she'd lost. Thus, it seemed only natural to wend her way Below the night before Winterfest and she found herself cozily ensconced in Father's study, sharing tea and trying to tease hints out of him, as to what Vincent had gotten her for a present. Faint memories of childhood anticipation and the games she had played with her own father flickered through her mind ("Is it bigger than a breadbox, Daddy? Does it have a bow or a ribbon, Daddy?"), but instead of sorrow for remembered traditions, she felt only the pleasure of being among people who cared enough to share their traditions with her. Plus, Father was keeping her well-occupied in trying to figure out his mysterious hints.

"Come on, you can tell me," she coaxed. "How big is it?"

"I tell you, I don't know," Father protested for the hundredth time. "And if I did, you know I wouldn't spoil his surprise. All I can tell you is that he's been seeing Elizabeth for quite some time about it."

Catherine pounced on the hint. "You told me a minute ago that he'd been talking to Cullen! And that Cullen had sent Kipper up to get rosewood specially."

"Did I?" Father asked with feigned innocence, eyes twinkling over the rim of his teacup. "Well, he saw Elizabeth too. And she sent Jamie up to buy some red paint and a tiny paintbrush right afterwards."

"Wasn't that Mouse going up for black paint last time?"

"Well!" Father huffed good-naturedly. "If you know so much about it, there really isn't anything I need to tell you, is there?"

"Oh, you..." Catherine laughed and reached around the books at the edge of the desk for a piece of paper to wad up and throw at him. There was a likely piece of note paper wedged partially under the bookends- the column-shaped, marble bookends. Catherine left off thoughts of attack to run a reflective finger over their smooth, cool surface. The warmth of Father's hand closing over hers brought her from her reverie.

"I've taken good care of them, Catherine," he told her seriously.

"Thank you, Father," she replied. "I feel better knowing that the things he loved are in good hands."

"Oh they are," Father held her earnestly, taking her hand in both of his and looking into her eyes with an expression she couldn't quite fathom. "They all are. Rest assured of that." The mood suddenly broke as Father glanced over her shoulder. "Ah Vincent! Perhaps you should take Catherine and give her her present now. She has been dying all evening to know what it is."

Catherine blushed, unable to look at her love after such a blatant plug, but Vincent's voice was amused as he answered.

"We cannot allow such a calamity to happen, can we, Father? Come." He held out his hand and Catherine disengaged herself from Father to follow him.

"Father has been telling me all kinds of tales about this present," Catherine commented lightly on the way to Vincent's chamber.

"Has he? What has he said?"

"Nothing very specific, but he makes it sound as if it was created by a cast of thousands."

"Perhaps it was," Vincent replied seriously. "Perhaps it was."

When they reached his chamber, he led her over to sit on the edge of his bed.

"Catherine, everyone has wanted to show you their appreciation for all you have done for us, and the generosity you've shown to us. We don't have much to give but our love, yet love has gone into every part of this gift." As he spoke he gently laid a bracelet and matching earrings in her hands.

"They're beautiful," Catherine sighed softly, holding them up for a better view. They were made of carved wood, lacquered black, then decorated with bouquets of delicate red roses.

"Elizabeth painted these, didn't she?"

"Yes. And Cullen carved them, and Mouse found the posts for the earrings, and Jamie and Kipper found the paints and the wood."

Catherine laughed. "It really was a cast of thousands! Oh Vincent, they're so lovely. I'll think of the kindness of everyone here each time I wear them."

"I'd hoped..." Vincent started, then trailed off.

"Hoped what?"

"I'd hoped... that you might wear them to Winterfest this year."

"Vincent, I'd be delighted. I'll have to look for just the right dress to show them off properly..."

"No you won't," he replied. "Mary has seen to that."

"I don't underst-," Catherine's voice cut off as Vincent laid a very familiar dress in her lap, the tears in the black lace mended so perfectly that they were invisible.

"Vincent- I can't! I..."

"You can. You must." His voice was softly urgent. "You see, I told them the story of this dress, and the jewelry was meant to go specifically with it. Catherine, you've given your love, and the love of your father freely to each of us. There isn't a person down here who does not own and cherish something of his. So we decided among ourselves that we had to return that love to you." Finally, she lifted her eyes to his again. "Please, Catherine. Wear this dress at Winterfest. Wear it, and be happy, and remember that your parents loved you and that we love you too."

Slowly, Catherine nodded, the beginnings of a smile tugging her mouth. "Will I catch the eye of someone who will love me the way he loved Mother?"

"You already have," Vincent told her.

END