

Darkness Before Dawning

by Angie

The Lady's First Song

*I turn round
Like a dumb beast in a show.
Neither know what I am
Nor where I go,
My language beaten
Into one name;
I am in love
And that is my shame.
What hurts the soul
My soul adores,
No better than a beast
Upon all fours.*

- *William Butler Yeats*

Catherine was leaving the Tombs, and knew she had what she needed for her current case - the only job remaining was to write it up. Perhaps it was the dark atmosphere of the place - the bars, the lighting, the guards, but she began to reflect as she walked the long corridors and through the various security gates to the entrance. She took her time and let her musing come to the foreground, which she rarely did.

She remembered telling Elliot, ages ago now, that the DA's work was relentless. It was more than that. It was that the DA got the tougher jobs, the cases that often involved people with money and/or influence. These were not common criminals, but often career ones, people who had caused great distress and death. Bringing them to justice was satisfying - but it took her to very dark places - places she had never known existed in her previous life.

The Tombs were now familiar to her, she who had been a society girl. She hated coming here, always felt exposed, too clean, and not entirely safe, despite the guard. She wished, not for the first time, that Vincent was with her in person, rather than just a sensation of strength and support in her mind and heart. He could do nothing in any case, and of course his presence was not possible, not in any world she knew.

The conclusion didn't satisfy her, but she shrugged and returned to the DA's office and her desk.

She had started working on her notes when the nagging returned and she stopped what she was doing to let it the thoughts germinate. It did not happen immediately, so she put down her pen and clasped her hands together.

Something wasn't right, and it concerned herself and Vincent and their separation. She had accepted, long ago, that Vincent could not be with her during the day. In fact, she had concluded on her own that the best place to see the man she loved was where he lived. Even

her balcony had now become fraught with possible danger, since she had been targeted by a peeping tom - one who had seen Vincent. They had both tried to return to the more innocent nights of the past, but it was not entirely successful. They were more wary now.

Yet these last few days, she had noticed that Vincent had been more in her thoughts during the day. Why? She cast her memory back, trying to make sense of it.

When she thought of it, something had changed after the incident with the outsider gang in the tunnels. Vincent had had to kill several of them, including a woman, to save his own community - and her. He couldn't distance himself from what he'd done, as perhaps he could when it was necessary above. He did not like his safe place being invaded. The Chinese gang had forced him into the role of protector earlier, without her safety being at all endangered. Was that the difference? Was she making it harder for him?

Vincent had retreated for a time into the deep places of his world, as he had told her when they finally met again. He had come back more quiet, less forthcoming about himself and what he felt than ever.

Then there had been those two young men and their horrible killings of prostitutes - men from her own society. Vincent's cry when it was all over and they had retreated into an alley haunted her.

'When will it end?'

She had been responsible for that. She had gone where she knew it wasn't quite safe, following what she wanted to believe was a lead - and been confronted by the two men she had been investigating. Vincent had had to rescue her. It had been a particularly bloody incident, and she had felt herself losing all perspective, certainly any perspective she should have had working for the DA. Afterwards, she was *glad* they had been killed, rejoiced in it almost. They were flaunting the law and the justice was satisfying, if unorthodox and certainly not in a court of law. Vincent had felt that in her. No wonder he was distressed!

Oh yes, then there had been that insane incident in the Park where she had been harassed by several policemen on motorcycles, to the point that she had fallen down. Vincent had taken care of them, and later her scrapes, below. He had asked the important question - who would do such a thing to her, and why?

She knew cops and now she thought about it, there was something very wrong with that incident. They had said nothing, just got closer and closer, until she fell down. They had not tried to arrest her, but seemed to be trying to kill her - or at least frighten her. Vincent had not said anything later, but he had seemed worried.

Why would she be targeted? In her business, someone associated with any of several of her cases could have been responsible. So the obvious conclusion was that they weren't cops at all, but paid thugs with some kind of message they had not been able to deliver, thanks to Vincent.

She sighed.

There was another problem in her life and it had a name and a motive - Elliot. Despite his words to her at the culvert, after they escaped the gunfight on the dock, he had not given up on her. He had called, twice now, to invite her to some daylight event in the Park. The timing indicated he now suspected that the man she loved did not attend her during the day, at all. Well, Elliot was clever and there had been other incidents tied to her, in those tunnels she had introduced him to, although he knew nothing of the residents. There was the blasting material she had received from him to rescue Vincent and Father, and Mouse's foray to his

building site that had ended in near disaster.

But there was something else.

How was she to find out what was nagging her sitting at her desk behind a three foot stack of files? Abruptly, she got up and decided to go to the corner cafe for lunch. It was a little past lunch time, but she would take her break now. Joe wasn't in his office, so she slipped out unnoticed.

She walked into the cafe and found a quite booth, sitting down with relief, idly glancing at a newspaper someone had left. *It seems so normal in here*, she thought. She needed to think. She ordered a coffee, which arrived quickly, but before she could take a sip, a voice said hello and she looked up to see Elliot. The last person she wanted to see!

She gave an inward sigh and listened to what he had to say, which began with an update on the events at the dock, to which she made the appropriate short responses, and ended with him saying, again, that he was waiting for her.

Frustrated, she was about to say something pointed, when he told her he had no choice. He left and said no more, leaving her even more frustrated.

She dropped her head to stare at the newspaper, no longer caring what it said. So much for a place to think, she thought, as she left a dollar bill on the table and headed back to the DAs office.

That turned into another confrontation, this time with a reporter who introduced himself as Bernie Spirko, and almost muscled his way into her space. He was barely polite and certainly pushy. He seemed convinced that she could give him the story that would make his career. His persistence, and familiarity with some of the incidents in her cases with Vincent was disturbing, but she didn't let it show and he left unsatisfied.

He had not left her alone after that, though, phoning her, trying to grab her on the street, following her home.

Between Spirko and Elliot, she felt that she needed someone to talk to, so she had taken the threshold entrance and signalled for Father. He had met her willingly and accepted her fears about Spirko, suggesting that Vincent be told.

She had confessed her connection with Vincent was not entirely just on his side, that she shared his violence too - and speculated that she fed on it, as he had said he did. Father had not disagreed, but his look said he supported her and her friendship with Vincent. That gave her some comfort, but it didn't stop her thinking along the same lines.

After Spirko and Elliot, she had stopped visiting the tunnels through the Park culvert entrance, in case she was being watched or tailed.

Vincent himself had seemed somewhat more ... distracted. That had been building up since the incident with the two men and their horrible killings.

Then there had been the incident in the music chamber not long ago. Vincent had seemed hag-ridden, distraught even, something she had never seen in him, even after their worst 'adventures'.

Her train of thought disturbed her again, and something nagged. Was she catching some of his dark thoughts - or worse, was he getting some of hers, now, more often?

She needed to talk to Father, again, but her work schedule had made that difficult. That first conversation after Vincent had run from the music chamber, had not helped her solve what was bothering her. Her stress level was building slowly but surely, and keeping a calm face

and mind was becoming more difficult in the face of what seemed to be an attack on her personally, as much as Vincent.

Vincent had not told her everything going on in his life, but something else was amiss there too, for certain.

Now she wondered. Was her emotional state being transmitted to Vincent? Was she actually making his emotional problems, worse? She had been incredibly busy lately and had not had much time to think, much less to reflect on her connection to Vincent. And she was inexperienced in masking her emotions, and was probably ineffective in burying them deeply too. She knew he picked up her surface emotions. She didn't know if she really could hide anything from Vincent, and since the incident with Stephen Bass, she suspected there were several layers to their connection, including that one was unconscious. Her attempts might not have worked at all, now she thought about it.

And what WAS happening in the tunnels? Spirko hinted he had a contact who knew everything. Catherine didn't know everyone in the tunnels, but she knew them well enough to know that they would never put Vincent in danger - and certainly wouldn't be speaking to a reporter like Spirko.

There was only one person she could think of that would know the tunnel world well and have the spite and genius to try to affect Vincent - Paracelsus. He must be doing something, although she could not guess what. Vincent was not mentally fragile, but he did have hang-ups, ones Paracelus was uniquely placed to amplify. She knew he worked in the background, through others he had with him wherever he was these days, and very carefully, so as not to alert Father. He had been behind that street drug madness she had investigated too and he had ensured Vincent became a victim of it. It had not killed him, but it had driven him mad for a time. He had had her kidnapped too, and that rankled. He had revealed himself to her then. Lastly, of course, he had nearly ruined Winterfest and almost killed Narcissa and William. Paracelsus was definitely capable of anything.

Catherine tried not to let her work day bleed into her time off, little though that was, but the cases lately had been terrible, even for the DA's office. Murders, child abuse, horrible assaults on women - in fact every kind of violence known to New York had seemed to pick this particular time to land on her desk. And never an easy case among them.

Was Vincent feeling all this with her? Was whatever Paracelus was doing adding to the stress at his end? Was Spirko hounding her because he had had tips, and who but Paracelus could give him those and egg him on? Perhaps that was far-fetched, but she had no other explanation for the sudden dark turn their lives had taken.

Did Father know or suspect anything, or was Vincent hiding his state of mind from the patriarch. He had done that before.

The next incident involving Spirko had been in the middle of the street, with the revelation that he had been to see Stephen Bass. That distressed her, but that emotion was quickly overcome with anger. Anger that Stephen had been interviewed and that he was as insane as he had been the last time she had seen him. But the clincher was the fact that Spirko said he was getting information from Elliot! That could not go unanswered, and she called Elliot to arrange a meeting. He agreed, as she knew he would.

The meeting, however, had not been helpful and she had left more angry than when she had entered. Elliot denied any connection with Spirko, but couldn't explain why the reporter had stated his name. In fact, Elliot couldn't know enough to do what Spirko was saying. In her calmer moments, she realized that. If his bodyguard, Cleon had been involved somehow, the

tunnel folk would have been alerted. But there had been no incursions as far as she knew.

She had met Vincent after that meeting and they had agreed that they should not meet for a while. The next night she had stood on her balcony, the mellow sounds of Mozart playing on her stereo, her mind elsewhere, when she suddenly found her mouth being taped, her arms held tightly and being carried down to the sub-basement in the elevator. She had fought, but the men had held her easily. At the bottom they had met Vincent, who easily dispatched them, and suddenly Spirko appeared, taking flash photographs.

They had both rounded on Spirko, who had been so demoralized by someone he could not have imagined, that she had convinced Vincent to let him go crawling back to where he had come from. That was stupid, she realized now, especially since she had not thought to take his camera away. More killing was, by that time, too much even for her. She had become part of the problem, she realized yet again.

Vincent was not dealing with it well and she had forced him to agree to stay away from her, promising not to visit the tunnels until something was resolved.

It did resolve, but in a way she could not have predicted, convoluted, nightmarish. Spirko was dead, Father captured by Paracelsus, the discovery - with Elliot and Cleon's help - of the penthouse where Paracelsus had killed Spirko, Father's rescue, Paracelsus' death at Vincent's hands - his mask ripped off to reveal he had been masquerading as Father. Then Vincent, more distressed than ever, refusing to see her, sending her away, clearly on the verge of a madness she couldn't understand. Father could not suggest anything when she asked, but again told her she was not to blame, that Vincent walked a fine line. It was true, this time. Paracelsus had been to blame for what had occurred - but Vincent's state of mind was not all his fault. She knew she had made it worse because of her job.

Thinking back over all this, she forced Joe to give her a weekend off. That or see her resignation on his desk. She had agreed. She had some thinking to do about her future. Somehow she had to stop what was happening to herself, and Vincent. Would she have to give up her job?

Dispassionately, she thought about her working life. It had got out of hand. She did not need to prove anything to the DA any longer. It was time for a change. Either they gave her work that would not involve the worst of intransigent criminals, or she would leave.

She had options. Her credentials would allow her to set up a community legal aid service. She liked the idea of helping people who might otherwise slip through the cracks. She had the money to make it happen, and quite a lot of experience now that she had not had when she started at the DAs office. It would give her satisfaction with very little, or no, danger to her person, or to Vincent. That last was critical.

As it happened, just as she was returning home, Father sent her a note asking her to come below.

She grabbed her coat and keys and left immediately to find the tunnels in an uproar. Vincent had become even more distressed, tried to break the culvert gate, injured people in his madness and finally been somewhat calmed by Father. After apparently telling his tunnel family he was leaving for their own safety, he had disappeared far below. Mouse had followed him and he and Pascal were monitoring him from a distance.

Catherine knew she would have to go to him, wherever he was. This was her fault, she was sure now. Their bond had become something more, something that needed to be resolved in order for them both to understand it. She could only think of one way to do that. She would have to break down Vincent's barriers to their physical love.

The Lady's Second Song

*What sort of man is coming
To lie between your feet?
What matter, we are but women.
Wash; make your body sweet;
I have cupboards of dried fragrance.
I can strew the sheet.
The Lord have mercy upon us.
He shall love my soul as though
Body were not at all,
He shall love your body
Untroubled by the soul,
Love cram love's two divisions
Yet keep his substance whole.
The Lord have mercy upon us.
Soul must learn a love that is
proper to my breast,
Limbs a Love in common
With every noble beast.
If soul may look and body touch,
Which is the more blest?
The Lord have mercy upon us.*

- William Butler Yeats

And so, Catherine decided to go to Vincent, over the objections of Father, who told her Vincent was mad and could harm her. That had never bothered her and she knew he was not capable of that at least.

She left Father, Mouse and Pascal at the entrance to a cave, and began her walk through the long tunnel to where she could here him roaring. It seemed to be the longest walk of her life. She was just a little fearful about what she would find.

She found him - or he her, more accurately - and lifted his arm as if to strike her. Then he seemed to come to himself and saw her clearly. The shock of what he had been about to do was reflected in his eyes. She saw it clearly, even in the dim light. He collapsed at her feet.

So she had been right, she thought. He could never harm her. What followed was satisfying and confirmed what she had suspected. The bond was partly responsible for their emotional distress, as if it wanted to see their relationship finalized. Once they had done that, it settled back into a soft closeness, a deeper and more meaningful one, that left no doubts in their minds that they were meant for each other. Vincent was tired, but held her closely, like a lover.

She made sure they were both presentable by the time she heard Father's cane approaching down the long tunnel. Vincent was helped to his feet and back to his chamber. She followed, her role now seemingly done for the present.

She visited him several times in the next few days, having taken leave from her job and explaining to Joe why that was necessary. Unusually, he had not argued. The months past had been bad for him as well, but she could not spare any more sympathy. Vincent deserved

all the love she could give him.

He seemed disoriented, but healthy. He clearly was not sure what had happened in that deep cavern. Father told her he had asked, and been told simply that she had brought him back to himself. She had not enlightened Father about her method.

She stayed below, so missed the news about Joe being nearly killed by a bomb. She heard through Dr Peter Alcott that he needed blood donations, and had Peter test her for compatibility. He discovered something else entirely - that she was pregnant.

With that news, Catherine went below again, and sat with Vincent. He was more aware now, and seemed to remember something that puzzled him. She was careful how she told him, but she did tell him, and saw that he was not really surprised. He thanked her for restoring his calm and his sanity.

Then she told him she was pregnant. That made him look at her closely and he nodded.

"Yes, I can feel the life growing in you. Our bond seems different now. I cannot feel your emotions, Catherine."

"Perhaps that's because I'm pregnant, Vincent. Perhaps this bond is calming us both."

"Yes. You will stay here? Please, Catherine."

"Yes. I have had Peter tell Joe I am resigning, and taking a long vacation. I will not be doing that kind of work any more, Vincent. I have other choices now, ones I did not have before meeting you."

"Is it safe to renew our love, Catherine?"

"Peter says it is, as long as we are careful."

"Then I would like that very much, now. I feel as if my body demands it, and perhaps our bond needs it too."

Catherine's response was to take his hand and lead him to his bed. The curtain dropped on what followed, but neither would forget it, ever. Their happy life had started, at last.

The Heart Of The Woman

*O what to me the little room
That was brimmed up with prayer and rest;
He bade me out into the gloom,
And my breast lies upon his breast.*

*O what to me my mother's care,
The house where I was safe and warm;
The shadowy blossom of my hair
Will hide us from the bitter storm.*

*O hiding hair and dewy eyes,
I am no more with life and death,
My heart upon his warm heart lies,
My breath is mixed into his breath.*

- William Butler Yeats