

Get Your Goat

by Angie

“We dance for laughter,
we dance for tears,
we dance for madness,
we dance for fears,
we dance for hopes,
we dance for screams,
we are the dancers,
we create the dreams.”

- Albert Einstein

1980

Why are you here, Cathy? She had asked herself this about a dozen times already, as well as wondering every few minutes why she didn't just leave, if she wasn't enjoying herself. Christmas holidays should not have frustrations like this. Jenny would understand.

But it was still too early to think about giving up. She had argued – mildly, admittedly - with her father about attending this Yuletide dance at Bethesda Terrace. She was old enough not to need his permission, but she always told him her plans so he wouldn't worry. However, the reputation of Bethesda Terrace had made him express some doubts, although the event would be well lit and had been organized by the New York Parks Board. He made her promise not to get there or leave alone, and to go straight to the taxi rank on 5th Avenue. It was a sensible request, and she readily agreed.

So, she just couldn't go home and admit the event was not at all exciting. Frankly, it was a downright bore. The disreputable people who usually hung around this location were nowhere in sight and she almost wished they were. At least they would have added some excitement. She suspected some security people were ensuring their absence, but at least they were discreet. Outside the dance floor, the lighting was dim, but no one was lurking about nervously.

It was a masked costume event, and there certainly were some beautiful outfits on display. She had spent at least half an hour gazing at them with interest. Everyone was wearing costumes with a lot of fur and padding, of course. It was cold outside.

But now what? Everyone seemed to be paired up. She had come with Jenny, hoping to meet someone. Jenny had quickly been asked to dance, but she had not. Surely there were some other unattached males here? But she could see none.

Unwilling to sit on the sidelines, Cathy wandered down to one end of the terrace and gazed out into

the night to where the angel fountain loomed, turned off for the winter. There was a light dusting of snow on the patio, but underneath the golden stone and beautifully-tiled ceiling, it hardly seemed like the dead of winter. An occasional gust of wind blew between the arches and cast a small blizzard of glittering snowflakes into the dancers, eliciting a few laughs from those nearest the entrance. No one else seemed to notice. The music was piped-in and cheerful, a medley of Christmas songs suitable for a dance. The effect was lovely, even she had to admit. A winter fantasy in the Park.



She turned around to walk back the other way, just for something to do, and perhaps see if any likely candidates were hovering around the wassail bowl. Something made her look to the left. She noticed a dark shape next to the balustrade and wondered how she had missed it. Obviously not one of the usual denizens, he was dressed in a short dark cape and was examining a carving on the side of the stone newel at the end of the balustrade, stroking it lightly with one gloved hand. That one, she thought, had a pair of stone pigeons in its little niche.



Cathy didn't hesitate. This was far more interesting. She walked over to him, thinking as she did so, what did she have to lose? He turned his head to look at her. For a instant, she had the odd impression he wanted to run away – but he didn't. And because she was moving quickly, she was soon too close for him to make a dignified exit.

He turned towards her and politely waited. She saw he was wearing a straw goat mask with a bell hanging from each horn, and that his dark clothing was set off with a heavy red brocade cape with a border of grey fur. The hood was pulled up, so she couldn't even see his hair. He looked big, tall, elegant – and mysterious. Irresistible, in fact, under the circumstances. Cathy took a deep internal breath.

"Good evening," she addressed him, trying to sound elegant herself.

"Good evening," he replied, with a voice that curled her toes.

"You seem fascinated by the stone carvings," she commented, hoping he wasn't going to make her play 20 questions.

"Yes. They're exquisite."

"Have you been here before?" she asked, now aching to hear more of his voice.

"Yes, but not for some time. You?"

"Not often. It has an unsavoury reputation, usually. I thought the dance might be fun, and I love that we are taking it over for a night. But you're the first person to speak to me," she said this last almost plaintively.

"Surely not," he remarked, sounding slightly outraged, as he looked across the patio at the gaily dressed dancers wheeling around inside the Terrace. "And I only spoke because you approached me," he added wryly.

"True, but I didn't give you much choice," she smiled behind her angel mask, then realized he wouldn't be able to see her mouth.

"Your costume is quite unique," she complimented him quickly.

He tilted his head at her and gave a deep chuckle, which she immediately wanted to hear again.

"I discovered an old Scandinavian legend that said a goat was the origin of Santa Claus, that he dressed in a similar costume and handed out gifts to children. Or maybe some generous character used goats to deliver gifts.

They still make goats out of straw in Scandinavia for Yuletide. So I asked a ... friend ... for some help."



"I would never have associated a goat with gifts," she admitted.

"I neither. Goats have been much maligned, despite being placid, a very reliable source of milk, and well-domesticated for millennia."

"I think it's the eyes," Cathy suggested. She had seen some in a kiddie zoo in the Park. Goats were almost cute ... until you saw their eyes. Freaky was the only word she could think of.

"Yes, I think that must be the reason," he agreed.

His eyes, what she could see of them inside the eye holes of his mask, seemed friendly, not freaky. They had looked blue, when he looked towards the pavilion. She could barely see his eyes now he was talking to her. Deep set, she decided.

"I couldn't think of anything but this," she told him, after a pause, indicating her costume. She was dressed in a white coat trimmed with white fur, and her faintly mischievous angel mask was trimmed with white feathers. "But no wings."

"An earthbound angel. The best kind," he remarked, with a bow. Then he seemed to reach a decision. "Would you care to dance?"

"I certainly would," she almost gasped. Yes, indeed. She wanted to know more about this unusual man whom, she guessed, wore a home-made costume. Hand-made, she berated herself immediately. Her craft class instructor had emphasized the difference, although in her case, the former was more apt, considering her lack of talent. She certainly had not made her costume for tonight.

And this man loved stonework. He had been examining it almost reverently.

"There are shortcuts to happiness, and dancing is one of them," he quoted as they neared the dance floor.

Cathy looked up at him, momentarily amazed again. He could quote Grand Hotel? What other talents did he have? Perhaps he could dance too,

He took her hand. She noticed he was wearing black leather gauntlets with a long fringe. His clothing amounted to an long black vest with a leather belt, a black sweater topped with a dark muffler, and dark pants. The whole effect was of a carefully-crafted, legendary character, she thought, as they entered the pavilion and inserted themselves into the melee.

He could dance, and he was better than good, smooth and considerate. Cathy let herself relax, following his lead and thanking the stars that she had taken a ballroom dancing class recently enough to not disgrace herself. Perhaps he was a dance instructor. That class was the last time she had danced with anyone who had such easy proficiency.

Despite her resolve, though, she couldn't think of a thing to say, and much preferred to concentrate on her dance steps and just enjoy being with him. She didn't want to break the spell. Later, she promised herself, she would ask him questions about himself.

She felt his arm around her tighten a little as he swung into some more complex waltz steps, perhaps realizing she would be able to follow. She moved a little closer still, wanting to feel his knees against her legs, and thereby have a better idea what he was doing. It also meant no cold winds could blow between them when they neared the ends of the pavilion.

After that, she stayed with him competently even on some of the complex moves he drew her into. He squeezed her hand slightly and she immediately returned it. He did not try to say anything and seemed content just to dance. He moved with a feline grace that she tried to emulate. And he seemed happy, if the way he glided across the dance floor was any indication. His hands held hers firmly, and she found herself wishing their gloves weren't necessary.

The cant of his mask as he gazed at her was speculative, or at least she hoped so. She looked at him as often as she dared, wondering what he looked like under the goat mask.

He was much taller than she, and she was wearing boots with fairly high block heels. Over six feet, she guessed, and despite his size, he moved fluidly, never once coming close to treading on her toes. His boots, she noticed, were a patchwork of black leather, supple and obviously soft, with a little bell on the side. The bells were drowned out by the music, if indeed they were that. And no heels. His boots made no noise on the tiled floor.

She became momentarily fascinated at the movement of his feet. Graceful and sure. Poetry in motion, she decided. Who had said that? No matter.

Cathy concentrated on not disgracing herself. She knew her small size meant he had to adjust his steps, but he did that too, effortlessly and automatically.

His cape didn't impair him at all, and a small chain kept it firmly in place. She felt as if they were flying, feet barely touching the ground.

As they wheeled around the floor to the cheerful medley, it was as if they had been partners for years. She had never felt so wonderful. Could love at first sight happen when both were in masks, she wondered. She felt energized, tireless. They danced on and on, each round making her love him more. She had to find out who he was! Soon, she promised herself. She loved being guided around the dance floor. No one else mattered as he skillfully wove them into the gaps and swirled her around to avoid anyone too close.

She had no idea how long they danced, but she did eventually notice that there were fewer couples, only because he didn't have to avoid them so often now. At the same time, she suddenly realized she wasn't tireless after all. She badly needed to take a break and steeled herself to tell him. She really didn't want to interrupt the magic, but was afraid her feet would stumble if she didn't rest a little. The thought that she might end up on her ass on the floor, or tripping over her own feet – or his - was making her self-conscious.

"I'm sorry," he rumbled, as she was about to open her mouth. "You must want to rest. I saw some chairs over there."

He led her smoothly to the edge of the dance floor.

"I do want to sit just for a little while," she temporized as she stopped with him, where a row of typical school-type bent wood chairs were set out, well away from the dancing area. Jenny, she noticed, was sitting in one and watching them.

"You're a beautiful dancer," she told him, unwilling to let him go, but uncertain how she could keep him with her.

He bowed. "Thank you, fair angel. You are very good yourself; a most delightful partner."

She gave him a deep curstsey, and he bowed to her.

"Excuse me," he said, as she moved to sit down beside Jenny. In the short time it took her to arrange her garb and sit down, he had disappeared.

"Who was that?" Jenny asked with an exaggerated stage whisper.

"I don't know," she admitted. "But he's a dreamy dancer."

"I saw you. You danced for almost two hours! How did I miss him?" her friend asked, her voice tinged with mild envy.

"I found him gazing at the stonework," Cathy told her.

"It's amazing in here," Jenny admitted, looking up at the ceiling, where the beautiful blue tile work could be seen above the strings of lights.

"Yes. I've seldom been down here. My dad would have had a fit if I'd even hinted at it."

Cathy spoke distractedly, wondering where her beau had gone, although she really couldn't call him that after such a short acquaintance. But she badly wanted him back, or at least where she could see

him. Perhaps he went to the men's room, or for some punch.

Jenny looked at her friend, then back at the dancers. "Can you see him?"

"No. He was tall, so he can't just disappear."

Jenny looked over the crowd. "Maybe he has a partner and went back to her."

"Maybe."

They sat there for some time, before Jenny became impatient. "Let's take a walk around the perimeter. If he's not anywhere, we could just dance with each other."

Cathy looked at her friend and grimaced behind her mask. She hated it when women had to dance with each other for lack of a partner. It was so ... sad.

They walked around the dancers, watching for the goat mask and deep red cape, but saw no one who fit that description. Cathy looked out over at the dark patio and then up the stairs when they reached that spot, but he was nowhere. Disappointed she stopped and turned around once more.

Suddenly, she wanted to be gone from there. The dance had reverted back to boring. She looked at Jenny. Her friend shrugged in her Mrs Santa costume.

"Serve us right for coming to something billed as a "Yuletide Heritage Dance. Everyone is from a bygone era – and no singles."

Cathy chuckled. "You got a dance partner very quickly."

"Oh, he was fine, but a bit stiff and he said nothing while we danced. I tried to get him to talk, but had to give up when all I got were grunts. He spoke only to thank me, when I just had to sit down. Then he went over to some woman in tall black boots and a short red frou frou skating outfit. She was probably the only one moving like a real dancer."

"These costumes do weigh one down." Cathy agreed. Winter wear was tiring – but she had danced for two hours! She could hardly believe it, but a glance at her watch confirmed it. Her partner had not seemed at all tired.

She noticed that more than a few of the chairs set out were now occupied, and a small crowd had gathered around the wassail bowl. And she hadn't even asked him his name – and of course she had not told him hers either!

"What now?" Jenny asked.

"I think I'd rather just go home," she said. "We can share a cab on 5th."

"Of course," her friend said, looking at her, but unable to see any expression because of the mask. She sighed. "It has been interesting, but hardly earthshaking," was her comment as they reached the cab stand.

"Yes," Cathy agreed, unwilling to say more. She wanted to fantasize about her dance partner in the privacy of her room.

Back home, her costume flung over a handy chair, Cathy could still imagine the warm pressure of her partner's hands and legs as they danced. She knew would never forget that snowy dance.

Soon enough, though, Christmas and New Year gave her new amusements and she gave up trying to unravel the mystery man of Bethesda Terrace.

"This year," intoned Father to a gathering of the tunnel people in the library, "I thought it would be nice if we found some inspiration from some of the older Yule traditions for our celebration. I've found some books with Scandinavian legends, which if nothing else, suggest a very interesting connection with our Father Christmas ... or Santa Claus - predating Christianity, of course. Did you know it may have originated as a goat character?"



Father looked around at his audience, which had a fair representation of adults, teenagers and children, with several Council members also in attendance. No one said anything, although there were murmurs from some of the children.

Vincent, listening, had a momentary spark of memory, but it escaped before he could grasp it. Catherine beside him, seemed to go suddenly still. He looked down at her but she said nothing. He went over what Father had said, but was distracted by the patriarch calling his name.

"Yes, Father?" he asked, realizing he had not been paying close attention.

"Would you like to take charge of finding us a tree this year?" Father scowled, repeating his question.

"Of course, Father."

Mollified, Father commented that perhaps they should focus on food and helping William, rather than a gift exchange. There were groans at this, especially from the children. Looking at them with a glower, he then suggested that everyone should make something small and unique to decorate the tree. Each would have a number attached to it, and at the end of the night, there would be a blind draw for them. There were a lot of smiles at that.

"Better get strong tree," Mouse commented, looking at Vincent, as everyone left the chamber.

Vincent nodded wryly. He hoped Mouse wasn't planning something that weighed the equivalent of a brick.

"Remember, Mouse. Something small," he reminded their intrepid engineer.

"Know that. Won't be too heavy," Mouse replied with a grin. He then dashed out the door, no doubt to plan his contribution in the privacy of the Mousehole.

Vincent disliked having to find a tree, since he had to do it when the light was poor and the choice limited in lots picked clean by others. Also, the transport of a tree was awkward in the tunnels. There was nothing pleasurable about getting it erected either. Perhaps Catherine would be willing to help find a suitable one.

Catherine looked up at him. She knew he was not happy about being the tree fairy. This year, perhaps she should help him. She still had her car, although it was in a garage a few blocks from the brownstone. She could do what he couldn't – pick a really good one, one that wouldn't have a bald spot or a strange cant, and take it to the warehouse. That would save some manhandling.

With that out of the way, they could concentrate on the decorations ... and their own celebration. That last made her smile. Nothing was better than being in Vincent's arms while they sipped wine and indulged in Christmas treats.

First, she wanted to see what the books showed. She needed some inspiration for her decoration. She walked over to the table and looked over Samantha's shoulder at one. She stiffened and stared. The image showed a straw goat and also a goat like figure in a Santa outfit. A memory poured back into her mind. Lord, she had not thought of that night in years!

Vincent came up behind her and circled her waist with his arms. She could feel his chin on her head as he looked down at the book too. Obviously, he had felt something from her and become curious. She wasn't sure she wanted to explain her memory to him. It was still very personal. But she could hardly have expected his response. He laughed.

"That looks familiar," he commented. "I remember getting some inspiration from this very book many years ago."

Catherine turned around in his arms and looked up at him, suspicious now.

"And what did you do with this inspiration?" she asked quietly.

Vincent suddenly looked uncomfortable. He looked over to where Father was talking with Mary and whispered down to her.

"Come back to our chamber and I'll show you. Father will not want to know about this."

"You mean he'll hear yet another story to blame for his grey hairs," she remarked softly.

"Yes," he admitted, turning to leave and taking her arm in his.

Intrigued, Catherine accepted his lead and they retreated.

Once at their destination, Vincent immediately suggested she sit down, so she sat in his big chair and waited while he went to his trunk, lifted the lid, and began to rummage around in it. He lifted out a bulky bundle of fabric and hefted it carefully. Bringing it over to his table, he unwrapped the fabric to reveal a battered hat box, which he opened. He lifted out something, turning so that his back was to her, then pivoted around quickly.

Catherine gasped and her mouth dropped open. For several moments she was speechless.

"You!" she finally managed to croak out.

Vincent let the goat mask drop and looked at her, puzzled.

"Me what?" he asked, when it seemed he wasn't going to get an explanation for her extraordinary response.

Catherine stood up and walked over to the fabric. Yes, it certainly was the same stuff, a dark red brocade, trimmed with fur. She had seen it very close up, so there could be no mistake. She picked it up and let it fall out.

"Would you put this on please?" she asked, careful to reveal nothing but mild curiosity now. There was

no doubt in her mind, but she wanted to see him wearing it.

He complied then looked at her. A suspicion was now growing in his mind. He looked at Catherine, did a minor calculation and abruptly decided to say nothing. He was aware that he had not left a good impression that night, so long ago.

Catherine looked at him and nodded. She knew he had figured it out himself by now, so decided to give him the story her way.

“Some years ago,” she began softly, “ I attended a dance under the Bethesda Terrace in the middle of



winter. I had a short conversation with a gentleman interested, apparently, in stone carvings, and then we danced for over two hours. When I became a little fatigued, he left me on a chair and I never saw him again. Oddly enough, he was wearing that exact same cloak and mask.”

Vincent looked very uncomfortable. Although he knew she knew it had been he – and would well understand his dilemma at this remove - he still felt it necessary to account for his disappearance that night. He’d had a slightly different reason for his disappearance, one he couldn’t have explained then. He had also been afraid of the inevitable questions he could not answer.

He gathered her to him and she lost some of her stiffness. A calculated risk, but he was gratified nonetheless.

“Catherine, you know all about me now. How could I explain to you then why I had to leave? What could I have said that would have not raised suspicions? And there was another reason. I saw someone I had not expected. Fortunately, he had not noticed me, perhaps didn’t recognize you either, so we were both saved some embarrassment.

“Peter?” Catherine asked, hazarding a guess. Who else would have known them both, even back then?

“Yes. I had to leave before he recognized me and reported seeing me to Father. He would not have done so out of any ill will, but because he would have assumed Father had loosened his grip for the night – figuratively speaking.

“My ‘freedom’ was something he often argued with Father about. Peter felt I should be trusted to take care of myself above, as long as I understood the dangers – which I did, of course. Just the same, Father agonized any time I was out of his sight.”

"But you didn't even say goodbye," Catherine mumbled into his chest. "All you said was 'excuse me', if I remember correctly."

"I thought it best not to encourage you," he murmured into her hair.

"And Father never found out?"

"No. He never saw the mask or cape. Annabelle helped me make it and I never told him where I had been. Fortunately, he didn't ask on that occasion. He had been sick with influenza and had spent the day in bed, finally, under Mary's orders. William had threatened to sit on him unless he obeyed her."

Catherine gave a short chuckle.

"And of course you never knew who I was either."

"How would I? You didn't tell me your name and I didn't give you mine. I regretted that oversight for some time afterwards, but eventually convinced myself it was for the best.

"I did enjoy our dance though, Catherine. I could have danced longer, although I was relieved when you started to flag. The longer I stayed the more likely Peter would see me. As it was, I had to make a very quick and complicated exit to avoid him."

"What was he wearing?" Catherine asked. She had not even noticed her old friend.

"He was one of several Santa Clauses," Vincent told her.

Catherine laughed then. "One danced with my friend Jenny, but I don't know if that was Peter. She said he never said a word to her except to ask her to dance and say goodbye. When he left her, he joined a woman in a short skating outfit and tall boots."

"That was Serena," Vincent remarked, naming Peter's wife. "She was having the time of her life, but fortunately not really looking at anyone but Peter. They were so in love. Just like your parents, I think."

"She was a bubbly person, always happy," Catherine remembered. Serena had died suddenly of a heart attack, not two years after that dance. Peter's daughter Susan had been a friend too. The thought sobered her.

Catherine had an idea then.

"Will Peter be coming to the Yule party, do you think?"

"No. I believe he told Father he'll be spending the holidays with Susan in San Francisco."

"Good, then why don't you suggest to Father that you do the draw as the goat gift giver. You already have a wonderful costume.

"And I will finally get my goat again, at last, and we can re-enact our dance. Well almost. You'll have to take me in something less than an angel costume."

Vincent laughed. "You'll always be my angel, whatever you wear, Catherine. Better to get your goat late than never," he quipped.

Catherine stood and hugged him. Ah that feeling. How could she not have known who was behind that mask? Out of context, and a long time ago, she excused herself. No matter, she had him now, and he had her.



“O brightening glance. How can we know the dancer from the dance?*”, he whispered to her.
She responded with her own quote. “Dance me to the end of love.**”
“That means we’ll never stop,” he pointed out, reasonably.
“Hmmm does that worry you?”
“Never again.”

END

* W.B Yeats

** Leonard Cohen