

# Knight of the Night

by Angie

*"Let craft, ambition, spite,  
Be quenched in Reason's night,  
Till weakness turn to might,  
Till what is dark be light,  
Till what is wrong be right!"*

— Lewis Carroll

After breakfast was finished in the dining hall one fall day, Father stood up and slammed his walking stick on the floor for attention. Every face turned to him. He cleared his throat.

"Halloween is about a month away and it's time to start considering what we will do to celebrate it this year. Perhaps a theme might assist ..."

"**VIKINGS**," Mouse yelled, interrupting Father. The whoops of the children to this suggestion told everyone what they thought of it. Father again banged his stick for attention, and the noise from the children's table ceased at his stern look.

"Anyone have any objection to a Viking theme?" he asked. There were none, and everyone started talking. He banged his stick again and called for volunteers. Catherine immediately put up her hand, as did Vincent, along with a number of others. Mouse fairly jumped up and down in his chair, but did not offer to help. As soon as Father had written down all the names and wished everyone a good morning, Mouse ran out of the door. Father shook his head, wondering what on earth had got into the boy this time. He was afraid he'd find out in the worst way possible. He sighed.

Vincent and Catherine strolled back to his chamber, deep in thought. Catherine had been thinking of Halloween, as the shops had already started displaying the usual icons of the spooky night. This was her favourite night of the year, the one night they could both enjoy above together. It was always special – but the tunnel costume party presented a challenge. It was fun dressing up, and she already had an idea for their annual excursion later.

The Viking theme didn't seem to offer much inspiration for the tunnel party, however. That helmet they wore, for instance.... that would be impossible!

They had barely got inside the door when Mouse shouted behind them.

"Vincent, Catherine. Got something for Vincent!"

They moved inside to allow Mouse to walk in front of them. He was brandishing a plastic Viking helmet. Catherine giggled. Vincent frowned.

"Found above," Mouse stated happily, nearly bouncing up and down. "Vincent has blue eyes and long hair. Make good Viking. Saw picture in Father's history class."

"Mouse, I don't think ...," Vincent started, but was abruptly interrupted by Catherine.

"That's a wonderful idea, Mouse," she stated, loudly, before Vincent could dampen the enthusiasm with some reservation or other.

"Okay good," Mouse said. He handed her the helmet, gave them both a grin, then ran out.

Vincent looked at the helmet and Catherine handed it to him. It was a mass-produced grey plastic item, with brass-coloured horns, a fake riveted border and 'metal' strips joining in a central knob on top. There was some kind of raptor as a boss on the front. He put it on, just to see if it would fit. It did. That was unfortunate, as he wasn't sure he wanted to wear it.

"These horns are the wrong colour," he commented, trying to find an excuse.

"They can be painted. It's very good," Catherine commented. "And Mouse is right, you have most of the natural look of a Viking. The rest doesn't matter, because we're not trying to disguise you. A few costume additions and you'd be perfect. Leave it to me."

Vincent sighed. He always left it to Catherine.

"But I will NOT have my legs uncovered as they did," Vincent insisted. He hated any part of his body being exposed.

Catherine chuckled. "I suspect they wore trews of some sort in sub-zero," she commented.

"Let me talk to Annabelle," he suggested, wanting to be properly involved this time. He hated fittings, but he also hated surprises. It was time he tried to let the anticipation cheer him as it did everyone else.

"Even your boots are right," his love continued, undaunted by his frown. He looked down at them, the pair he love best, leather, long and fur-lined. He supposed they were close enough, supposing history books had them described correctly. He would need some leather straps to bind his pants, but he had them because he wore them to keep his sleeves from catching in things. Something fur-like could be found for a suitable vest, he was sure.

"The rest should be easy," she remarked, as if reading his mind. "Cheer up, Vincent. This is only for the tunnel party, after all. We'll go above as we usually do and you won't need to disguise your face. I like the idea of just walking around the park this year, seeing the decorations. But I will want to disguise myself ... a little."

"And what will you wear to the party?" he asked her.

"Oh, I think I can find something in thick velvet, with good pair of boots and a nice long blonde wig tied in a suitable style." Her hair was too short for anything fancy, so a wig was best. She'd have to research head coverings. And accessories like a belt. She had no idea what female Norse wore, but she was sure there was something she could find.

And as for their annual walk above, she wanted to be warm. She liked dressing up, and she wanted Vincent to feel safe, and herself disguised a little. And as it happened, the costumes already existed from a play they had put on earlier in the year. A cloak could be added perhaps. She would go and talk to Annabelle.

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Catherine visited Annabelle, finding her as usual, buried in boxes of found or donated fabrics. There would be a lot of demand for something for Halloween, but there was also a huge stock of costumes already created for one occasion or another. Plays below often required costumes, and sometimes they were even donated.

Catherine saw that the costumes she wanted were still hanging up and thanked the Fates. Certainly there was nothing Viking about them. She walked over to the rack and extracted the two she wanted and took them to Annabelle.

"May I have these?" she asked the back of their diminutive seamstress, barely visible against in a pile of clothing on her sorting table.

Annabelle turned and gave her a smile that hinted of secrets held.

"Of course, Catherine. I'm guessing you and your hunk want to wear them above, for a roaring good time." She snickered at her own joke.

"Yes, but I wonder if a cloak or something might be a good idea to give them a little something."

Annabelle's smile got even broader and her eyes twinkled.

"I have just the fabric, if you dare," she said, and led the way to a large, battered cardboard box. She reached into it and drew some glittery stuff into the light. And then more of it. An armload, which she carried to a worktable.

Catherine looked at it in wonder. "Where did this come from .... and what was it?"

Annabelle showed her the some patches that were faded and sun-frayed.

"Drapes, I think. The rich are not like us," she quipped."

Catherine frowned. The fabric was gold, garish, totally unspeakable for anything larger than a ... a ... cushion.

"Who would use this for drapes?" she asked rhetorically, because she had a pretty good idea.

Annabelle merely rolled her eyes and looked skyward. Catherine nodded her understanding. How would New York ever live that man down? And how had this reached the tunnels? She decided she'd rather not know.

"There's a lot here, Catherine, enough to make two Halloween cloaks. I can keep them very simple."

"That would be wonderful, Annabelle!"

That settled, Catherine spent the next few days finding herself some Viking-like, and helping Vincent with his costume, which turned out to be as easy as she had predicted. They even found a torc-like metal necklace and wrist guard for him.

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Halloween arrived with the usual clamour from the children and the harried oaths from William, who had to regularly shoo the tots from this kitchen, now filled with containers of cookies and squares, apples and simple hors d'oeuvres for the Halloween party. It would start before the usual supper hour, but there would be food enough to satisfy everyone. He would serve a soup and sandwich lunch, to give sustenance to the folk who were decorating the Great Hall.

Vincent and Catherine were there right after breakfast, helping to hang garlands and arrange spooky candles, jack-o-lanterns, and various other decorations in places where they would have the best effect.

By the time lunch was announced, both were hungry enough to eat ravenously. Everyone dressed in their costumes right after lunch and some returned to the Great Hall to help set up

the tables of food, drink, plates, cups and cutlery. The tunnel community filed in quickly and immediately the atmosphere became congenial.

Vincent attracted some attention when he and Catherine entered; he even heard a chuckle or two - but not for long. All eyebrows rose, and raucous guffaws exploded from the spectators, when William appeared in a full leather breastplate with a fur shirt underneath, and pants tied above his boots with thick rope that looked like it could hold a dragon ship in a North Sea storm. Vincent could not prevent himself laughing with the others. Catherine laughed until her stomach hurt.

William, however, was unmoved by the reaction, and took up his customary position in front of the beer barrel to serve any adult who wanted it.

Shortly after that, the Hall was filled with noise and merriment as the children arrived.

By the time the children had played all the games and everyone had eaten their fill of treats, and the former had been sent off to bed many hours later, both Catherine and Vincent felt the need for some fresh air. The vast number of candles in the Hall, plus many which had burned low and charred the inside of the jack-o-lanterns, had rendered the atmosphere almost toxic, in Catherine's opinion. They were quickly blown out and lanterns handed around to anyone who needed light to return to their chambers.

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Vincent and Catherine hurried back to his chamber and got into their outside costumes. Catherine put on her mask and Vincent looked at her, a little wistfully.

"I almost wish I needed one," he remarked dryly.

Catherine removed her mask and looked at him. She could not, of course, imagine what it meant to be him on this night of all nights, but she found his remark bewildering. Her mask was a poor representation of its type, but it would have to suffice.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I know I'm not in disguise, while everyone else will assume I *am*. Any other night of the year, I must hide my face."

"And you wonder why pretense is more acceptable than reality?" she guessed.

"Yes."

"You said it yourself years ago on my balcony, Vincent. You are truly alone, and you represent what men fear most."

"Sometimes I talk too much," he replied with a sigh. Also, his love had a disconcertingly accurate memory.

"You're honest, Vincent. That's a refreshing quality, one not held in great regard in the world above. This night, of all nights, your honesty, your true self, is visible."

"Only the outer shell of it, Catherine," Vincent replied quietly.

"Which is all we see of each other, in disguise or not," she responded.

"Yes. And beneath the deceptive exteriors, some true monsters exist."

"Of which you are not one, Vincent."

"We both know that is not true, Catherine. What I have done rates me among them. No matter what my reasons."

"I think not, Vincent, nor would anyone in these tunnels agree with you. You know what you have done - and you know you had no choice. The true monsters care nothing for anyone but themselves.

"We should get above, now, before we lose any more of this night," she reminded him, putting on her mask again and effectively closing the discussion.

Vincent sighed, took her arm, and they made their way to the culvert entrance. Before opening the door, Vincent paused to sense beyond it. There was something ....

He put his finger to his mouth to warn Catherine and listened. He heard a cough and then the crash of glass breaking. Then oaths and feet running away. He waited some time, then sensing that there was no danger, he pushed the lever to open the door, but motioned Catherine to wait. He went out and down the right hand tunnel. He found what he had expected, a still form, huddled at the end. A quick examination told him that this person would not trouble anyone, ever again.

He went back to Catherine and beckoned her. She followed him to the crumpled figure and looked up at him in shock.

"Dead?"

"Yes. But he cannot stay here. He might attract unwanted attention. I'll carry him out if you go ahead and let me know if you see anyone close by."

Catherine did as directed and beckoned to Vincent when she could see there was no one in sight. He carried the man over his shoulder, and over to a stand of pines. He carefully put the man under them, but left his feet sticking out, so that he would be noticed, eventually.

"Not a great start to our evening," Catherine whispered to him, as they moved off along a nearby path.

"No, and I fear the perpetrators are still in the Park. We must be careful. There are more than pretend monsters at large this night. I can feel them."

Catherine didn't question his assertion, and moved closer to him. He took her hand. He was not particularly worried about being a target, knowing that his size would make that unlikely, but he did worry about Catherine. It was not unheard of to target a woman in hope of making her escort do something foolish. He was also sure that the danger would not be from a single mugger. On a night like this, they could well be travelling in packs. He decided to say nothing to Catherine and to get to the area where the Halloween celebration was being held quickly.

And his resolve held until they reached a corridor of jack-o-lanterns leading to an open air dance floor, with many couples already dancing to some spooky jazz.

He heard something off to the right that did not belong with the merriment ahead, and hesitated. He was aware that it was risky, but he could not ignore someone in trouble.

"Catherine," he whispered. "I must leave you for a few minutes. Please go to the dance and wait for me near this pathway."

"Vincent...?"

"Please," he begged.

She nodded and made her way swiftly to the dance floor. He saw her safely there and quickly melted into the trees, moving silently among the deep shadows. He did not have far to go. He heard the sounds of conflict and soon saw the cause. Two men were circling an old woman and he caught a flash of knives. They were swearing at her and the woman was yelling her own oaths back at them. She was trying to keep a two-wheeled, wire shopping basket behind her and away from the men. Whatever was in the basket was hidden inside a black garbage

bag. Her belongings, he supposed. He guessed she was one of the people who sometimes slept in the park.

What could they possibly want with her? He shook his head, mystified. Obviously, she was just an opportunity to terrorize. With the loud music and lights, their activities would go unremarked.

Vincent looked around for some way to disrupt the menace, without revealing himself. He had no wish to roar out and frighten the woman ... or kill the men. He spotted a wire waste basket and with a quick twist, broke it from the mounting. No one in the little drama nearby noticed because of the ambient noise.

He waited until both men were in a line from his point of view, then heaved the basket at their legs. They went for a very satisfying tumble, like two bowling pins, and their knives went flying well away from them. They did not immediately move, so Vincent quickly approached the woman, who was staring at her erstwhile assailants in amazement, and made no objection to him leading her to the pathway and herding her to where Catherine was waiting. The woman, recovering from her shock, gave Catherine a gap-toothed grin.

"I never expected to be rescued by two lions," she remarked, fidgeting from foot to foot. "I was looking for the washrooms. Thank you," she said, looking up at her rescuer.

The voice, far from querulous, was not what he expected from a homeless person, and Vincent stared at her in surprise. With more leisure to examine her, he realized there was none of the stink of the streets on her, and that her teeth were only painted. However, something was not quite right.

"You are welcome," Vincent replied, puzzled.

"You're welcome to walk with us," Catherine offered. "They might come looking for you again."

"They might," their companion agreed. "And I still need the washrooms."

"Over on the other side," Catherine told her. "We'll walk you there."

They made their way quickly around the perimeter of the dance pad and showed her to the washrooms, which were partly hidden behind a dense cedar hedge.

"Don't know how I missed them," the woman groaned and pushing her basket in front of her, quickly ran into the *Ladies*.

"I take it you found our thugs?" Catherine asked, as they waited.

"Yes. I recognized their scent. They will have some bruises, certainly – and their weapons are probably lost as well. I bowled them over."

Catherine chuckled, guessing he was not making a pun, but explaining what he had done. She hoped the men were damaged enough to be out of commission for the rest of the night.

They waited ... and waited. Catherine was feeling the cold and wanted to get moving. She ached to dance.

The woman returned, finally, and seemed much cheerier. Catherine, who could see her eyes clearly in the floodlit doorway, groaned inwardly. The woman's demeanour clearly said she had been shooting up. Catherine looked at Vincent and squeezed his arm in warning. She couldn't warn him any other way with the mask on.

"Did you come with someone?" Catherine asked, as the woman looked around.

"Oh no. I never come to these things with anyone. I like to mingle – but I usually see someone I know. Thanks again for rescuing me. I'll see you around."

With that she grabbed her cart and wove her way around the dance pad, disappearing

quickly into the crowd of merrymakers hovering on the fringes of the dancers, where a few booths were offering food and drink.

Catherine sighed. She looked up at Vincent. "May I have this dance?" she asked, since he seemed to be distracted.

He smiled down at her. "Of course, Catherine."

They made their way onto the pad and danced quietly to the rather unusual music, which seemed to be a medley of every spooky song ever made. But it was lively and that was what Catherine wanted to warm up.

"What were you warning me about," Vincent finally asked, when he thought he could make himself heard.

"That woman. She was a drug addict."

"Ah. That's what puzzled me. She didn't smell like a street person. And she was better spoken."

"There are so many of them now."

"Yes," Vincent agreed, thinking of Rolley. Unlike him, most didn't have anyone to care about them.

They enjoyed quite a long dance before a disturbance at the edge of the floor made itself known to them. By the time they stopped to see what was going on, most of the celebrants were also looking that way and even the music could not drown out the shrill screams of a woman and the equally loud shouts from at least one man.

Vincent groaned. The voices were all familiar. He made as if to approach the altercation, but Catherine stopped him.

"Let the park police handle this, Vincent. They're on their way, see?" She pointed across the way where a mounted policeman could be seen riding quickly towards them. Two more approached from a different direction.

The three horsemen separated out the combatants with practised efficiency, herded them towards the washroom hedge, and kept them there while another policeman arrived and dismounted, to be joined by one of the other three. It gave Vincent some satisfaction to note that the two men were limping heavily – and that their knives were not in evidence.

The policemen quickly put cuffs on them, to loud protests from all three, then led them across the park towards Fifth Avenue, followed by the mounted cops and the spare horses.

There being nothing more to see, the crowd began to dance again. Vincent and Catherine followed suit.

"*No good deed goes unpunished*," Catherine quoted wryly, soto voce.

Vincent shrugged. Even had he known what would happen, he would still have helped the woman. Likely there was some argument about drugs. That still left the puzzle of the dead man, but perhaps he owed the thugs money. Violence in the park, at night, was not unusual. He had seen some of it himself.

They danced for a while longer, then decided to observe the dancers for a while from a nearby bench. They had just sat down when Vincent stiffened. He turned around to look over the back of the bench and spotted something. He nudged Catherine. She turned to look and saw the wire shopping basket the woman had been pushing. Obviously, she had hidden it, and just as apparently, she had been taken away by the cops without it. Was that the cause of the argument?

"What should we do?" Catherine asked. She really didn't want anything more to do with the basket, or its owner, but she wasn't sure that leaving it where it was would be a good idea. She definitely didn't want to be pulling it around the park.

"I think I could move it to where we left our dead friend, without raising undue notice," Vincent suggested. "You stay here, Catherine. I will be faster alone."

Catherine nodded and watched him scoot around the bench, grab the basket and move swiftly into the dark shadows. She turned to watch the dancers again, hoping that there were no more surprises for them this evening. Granted, they were not in danger, but she hated that their excursions often seemed to include some kind of adventure, just as the first Halloween had. She sighed and tried not to worry.

Vincent returned as silently as he had left, so silently that she did not see him until he touched her shoulder and sat down beside her.

"All done?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm glad we moved it. I looked inside the bag in the cart and it was full of plastic bags of white powder, Catherine. Drugs I assume. What was she doing with that?"

"Perhaps she stole it from someone else," Catherine suggested. Now she knew she would have to report this. That amount of drugs could not be left sitting around the park. She sighed and wondered where the nearest telephone was. Of course - there had been one on the side of the washroom building wall.

"Vincent, I'll have to call this in. Anonymously, of course. I saw a telephone by the washrooms."

"Then we will go there, Catherine."

Once again, they made their way around the dance floor to the washrooms. Catherine dug around for a dime, and rang 911. She disguised her voice as she reported a dead man and a cart full of drugs in the park, and gave the location. Then she hung up before they could ask her for her name.

"I think we should make ourselves scarce now," she told Vincent. "They'll be looking for whoever rang that in. Perhaps we should go back below. Do you mind?"

"Of course not, Catherine. Let's go. But we'd better go in a different entrance because they'll be too near the culvert."

"There's another?"

"Oh yes, but not quite as easy to find. It's off Fifth Avenue."

They walked slowly over along the well-lit pathways to the street, admiring many of the displays, even stopping to sit down amid one with lots of ghosts and pumpkins. There was no particular hurry, as they were a long way from the culvert. - but they didn't want to attract attention either. There was no one to report their appearance, except the woman, and she was safely in custody. Catherine knew she could not be recognized and no one would see Vincent for another year.

At the Fifth Avenue entrance, Vincent led the way around a dogleg and pushed through a similar metal gate into the tunnels. Catherine breathed a sigh of relief. They were safe. She must be getting paranoid, she thought. Was there something she had not taken into account in their little adventure? She hoped not. One thing about Halloween, it didn't make identification easy, although she would recognize that woman again, if she saw her. She sincerely hoped she wouldn't.

"Would you like to go anywhere in particular?" Vincent asked her, as they neared the home



tunnels.

“Could we just read to each other in your chamber?” she asked. She really wanted to forget what had happened – and having Vincent read to her was the best way she knew.

And that was how they spent the night, until Catherine had to return to her apartment and try and get a few hours sleep before she had to go into work.

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She didn't sleep much, no surprise, and as soon as she walked into the office, only half awake, Joe planted himself in front of her. She forced herself into wary attention when he began to tell her about a huge drug cache found in the park with dead man ... because of a unidentified phone tip.

“Mugging?” she asked.

“Likely,” Joe agreed. “But get, this Radcliffe. The drugs were in a shopping cart and the owner of that cart was in custody, along with a couple of enforcers of our acquaintance. They claim ignorance of either the cart's contents or the dead man. They're all lying, of course, but we can't tell which part they're lying about.”

Catherine shook her head, mostly to clear it of any remaining sleepiness.

“Is it important?” she asked, wondering where this was going.

“Not anymore. But get this too - the woman kept on shouting about a couple of lions who stole *her* cart - with her belongings in it. The two men claim a big lion threw a garbage can at them. They're both covered in bruises, by the way, so they sure met someone who took a dislike to them. I'd give him a medal, if I knew who it was. And meanwhile, the drug cart, which sounds exactly like the woman's missing cart - right down to the black garbage bag - ends up with a corpse who was post mortem some hours previous to the arrest of these three.”

Joe stopped to take a breath. Obviously, he wasn't finished yet.

“Never discount the possibility of a good Samaritan,” Catherine remarked before he could begin again.

Joe's mouth dropped open and he stared at her.

“Very good, Radcliffe! See, that's exactly what we figure. That corpus belonged to a guy with a rap sheet as long as my arm. Always drugs, more drugs, distro, pusher ... And it seems, he was also using some of the product ... without paying for it. We got this from the two thugs. They didn't say they deep-sixed him – but he had a dent in his skull that killed him instantly. No proof, of course, even with what we figure is the murder weapon, a booze bottle filled with sand, found nearby. No prints.

“Any passerby *might* have figured the guy was just sleeping it off – beings as how his feet were sticking out from under a pine tree. But how did the cart end up with him ... after he was dead? Hell, Radcliffe – that's almost spooky.”

Catherine yawned. She couldn't help it. It was partly relief, and partly fatigue. She waggled her hands at her boss and shrugged. Her knight had perhaps done a little more than necessary, but he was also honest, gallant, strong ... and thorough.

“Joe, it was Halloween. When the spirits of the underworld walk the night. Call it satanic retribution ... and let it go.”

Joe snorted, looked at her with an expression that clearly showed his scorn for her pitiful attempt at humour, and stomped back into his office. He closed the door and before Catherine managed to get herself to move, she heard the sounds of darts hitting the target.

Just another day, nothing unusual at all, she thought wryly. She made her way to her desk and sat down, then dismally regarded the stack of files waiting for her, almost a foot high. She stretched to look over them at Joe's office, then realized, belatedly, that there was almost no one else in the office, and put her head onto her arms behind the stack. A few minutes sleep would help her focus better ...

She was still napping when Joe approached her desk a couple of hours later. He regarded her and his face got an unusually soft expression. Then he placed the files he was carrying softly on top of the pile and went back to his office, whistling under his breath.

*Cathy must have had one hell of a night, he mused. Yet she came in, when more than half the DA's office was AWOL! Nothing was urgent – but no one was working even if there was.*

Joe went into his office and leaned back in his chair, eyeing his dartboard with distaste.

*Maybe Radcliffe had the right idea ....*

He closed his eyes.

END