

## In a Different Place (Vincent)

by Angie

Vincent sat down on the edge of his bed, after leaving Catherine at her threshold, and looked around his chamber. He had not slept in it for ten days, but in a nearby unfinished chamber so as to be close if she needed him.

Instinctively, he got up and sat down at his table to write in his journal, while events were still fresh in his mind.

*She lay just over there. My bed and chamber now seemed empty without her. I look around and see all the familiar things I have collected over the years, but I see them now with new eyes, perhaps as Catherine would have seen them.*

*I have been changed, first by Catherine's presence in my life, and now by her absence.*

*Loneliness is part of who I am, what I am. I seldom consider it. In my world everyone depends on everyone else to survive. I have helped care for many of my tunnel family. Nursing a woman from the world above made me realize the depth of my aloneness. She awakened something I cannot put a name to.*

*I spent as much time as I could with her, both to ease her fears and take her mind off the pain. Our painkillers are not as strong as she would have received in a hospital above. Our medical supplies are limited and used sparingly. So I read poetry and stories to her and we discussed them. My voice seemed to sooth her, and she was happy when I was with her.*

*I already miss having someone different to talk to, someone who has seen things I will never see, only know from books - and tell me about them. Father avoids such reminders, thinking they make me long for the impossible. Catherine had not known about that stricture, of course. To have that barrier dropped, if only for a short time, made me aware that I was as much a prisoner as she.*

*Had I intended to hide my face from her forever? Father had bandaged her face completely, to ensure she didn't move unnecessarily, or touch any of the deep cuts he had so carefully stitched. But those bandages would have had to come off before she could return above. Some secrets could not be hidden.*

*Catherine was observant, and had lots of time to think as she lay in my bed. She asked me about the trains and the tapping on the pipes. She had sensed my reluctance to say much about this world. I told her more than Father would have sanctioned, but once she knew she was safe, she didn't press me for more. She understood the necessity.*

*Having a woman in my chamber 24 hours a day had been strangely satisfying. I knew it was necessary, so that our guest learned only what was unavoidable. What had she thought of my chamber when she saw it for the first time? She had searched it for a mirror, after unwrapping her bandages, while I was getting her tea. I knew she had been trying to find a mirror - or anything she could see herself in. She had not realized I did not have such things - or why.*

*I know what I resemble, all too well. She had been shocked by my appearance and that had hurt - more than it should have after so many introductions. Then I felt her shame and regret almost immediately, even as I left her alone. When I returned with her clothes, I sensed that her damaged*

face had given her some perspective on mine. She asked how I had come to be. It was a reasonable question - and I answered it as I usually did. When she pushed back my hood, I knew that she truly saw me and did not judge. I will never forget that moment.

She saw some of his world as I led her home, although I took her by ways that avoided the common areas. She had been amazed at what she saw. Then I left her at her basement threshold, without even saying goodbye, except with my heart, so instinctive was my reaction to the sound of stranger's voices.

Perhaps she would like to visit again. I would have to convince Father. I felt Catherine's genuine gratitude and sensed she would enjoy meeting the members of my family. She could even become a Helper, if she wished.

She will need friends, endure much with a scarred face. I can hardly comprehend the kind of person who could inflict such wounds on another. I know she is strong, though. I can feel her resolve.

I must stop daydreaming as there is work to do. I have not helped with the usual repairs and chamber cutting while nursing Catherine. My strength is needed in several areas.

For the past two days, I worked deep below, repairing, digging, adding pipes. I and the other men ate and slept where we were working, our meals brought down in relays from the kitchen. I had no time to brood.

Then we finished and after a quick clean-up and substantial supper, I stripped off my clothes and soaked off the grime in the bathing chamber. I was able to relax at last.

I felt carefully along the bond for Catherine, something I had not told her about, although I must one day. I was pleased to discover there was nothing amiss. She seemed calm and resolved - and relieved. That meant her world was treating her well. I'm happy for her.

I know she is rich by the standards of my world. Her clothes were very good quality. Mary, who had repaired the ripped coat as best she could, had commented on that. Her apartment building was old, but obviously for rich tenants, since it overlooked Central Park. It had a doorman too, I noticed, when I went above to look at it, to determine its exact location for the threshold entrance.

That entrance will remain, although we will have to change some ways. Mouse will see to that. Catherine will not betray us. I know her heart.

She has warmed a place in my heart. I close my eyes now and allow myself to re-live those last moments, before the sound of voices made me leave her. She had laid her head on my chest and hugged me, so tenderly that my bones wanted to melt from joy. I have never felt such ... oneness ... with anyone.

The memory makes my face heat up and my groin pulse. I dampen the latter. How could I hope to be attractive to any woman? Father would certainly not approve. He is protective of me. Catherine, though, saw no reason to treat me as other than a man - and the one who had saved her life.

I remember her voice, soft and affectionate, and smile.

Am I in love? Dare I be? It is much stronger than anything I felt for Lisa, all those years ago.

What am I to do? How can I go back to the way things were before I met Catherine? Do I want to? Truthfully, I do not want to forget her, ever. I want to see her again.

I did not finish reading 'Great Expectations' to her. The last chapter remains. Perhaps I could take her the book. The apartments in her building have balconies and I can leave it there for her - but not yet. The time is not right. She needs time to re-adjust to her world.

*I try to read, as I lay in bed, but my thoughts are always on Catherine. I feel her fall asleep, and then I know that I can do the same. It comforts me to know that we share this.*

*Then, one day, searching my sense for Catherine, it almost disappeared. I was suddenly afraid for her, then I realized that she was just very deeply unconscious. Perhaps she hadn't been able to sleep and had taken a sleeping pill. These last days must have been difficult for her.*

*During the next week, I felt Catherine's boredom, and one evening decided to visit her. Then I belatedly realized she was not in her apartment, but elsewhere in the city. Perhaps she is visiting and would return later that night, but she didn't. Then, I felt her leave New York. I can sense she is well, although apprehensive. I sense she wants to return, is impatient to do so. I do not understand. There is so much about our connection I that puzzles me. I must be patient.*

*I realize as I write this, that Catherine has opened my eyes to a different place, one I did not know exists. She shares that place with me, forever.*

*I am now glad that I did not say goodbye to her, which implies an ending. Better to believe it was only a farewell - and that I will see her again.*

*END*