

New Moon

by Angie

*This grey spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.*

-Alfred Lord Tennyson

(Author's Note: This story takes place immediately after Ceremony of Innocence – if that had taken place near the end of October - and provides an alternate ending to Season 2.)

“The nightmare is over, Vincent.”

“No. It’s not over.”

Paracelsus was dead, but Vincent’s words haunted Catherine. Paracelsus had exposed a deep internal pain in Vincent, one which threatened to overwhelm him.

She was watching over him in his chamber, trying not to feel despair. This was the third day and he was still lying on his bed staring at the uneven stone of the ceiling, stiff and uncommunicative. He had not told her to leave, so she stayed, trying to send her love along their bond, but unsure whether he could feel it – or if he wanted to.

He had eaten nothing and drank only water given to him directly. He had not moved off the bed while she was there, although he must have done so after she left him in the evening. He seemed not to have moved when she returned. He had not even changed his clothes.

When someone, usually Jamie, brought them meals on a tray, she ate hers, then tried to get Vincent to eat. He merely shook his head and resumed his stare.

In the evenings she went back to her apartment via her threshold, which now had greater security and a sentry, and tried to sleep. She could have stayed in the guest chamber, and had left a small overnight bag there just in case, but had decided that she needed to return to her apartment, if only to shower and check her messages.

She got very little sleep, though, and was almost as haggard as Vincent. She had told Joe she needed some time off to think and rest. For once he had not argued. Her voice must have told him all he needed to know. She was exhausted, running on nerves. The past few weeks had been stressful.

She didn’t know how to give Vincent solace – or if that was possible. She would have kissed him if she thought it would help, but she felt, instinctively, that he did not want any physical closeness. He wanted to remain isolated and alone with his thoughts.

She was about to leave and go home for what remained of the night, when Mouse tiptoed in. He came into the chamber at least once a day, regarding Vincent wordlessly. He was unusually quiet. This time he handed a note to her and she nodded her thanks. Mouse stage-whispered into her ear.

“Found it in Chamber of the Winds, under a stone on a rock. Didn’t read it.”

Then he gave a quick glance at Vincent and left.

Catherine looked at the piece of paper, its fold sealed with candle wax. She broke the seal and opened it quickly. It was a terse message.

“Vincent and Catherine,

Please come on the night of the new moon, at sunset. Do not eat that day. Drink only. I will explain.

That would be tomorrow night! And two nights after that would be Halloween. Catherine had hoped that Vincent would be feeling better by then, or his gloom would cast a shadow on a night the children eagerly looked forward to all year. They should be carving pumpkins very soon - Father always insisted it not be done too early - making candy and decorating the dining room with paper ghosts and hanging trails of “spider web” everywhere. So far, no one had said anything about any of this, and that was worrisome. Vincent seemed oblivious to the time of year, as he was to so much else.

She remembered her first Halloween with Vincent and ached to be able to walk with him around the City again. There would be a festival in the Park and she had hoped perhaps they could mingle there – if he would only ... let the dead lie.

Catherine got up and walked over to the bed and sat on it, regarding Vincent. His eyes were open, so he was awake and had probably heard Mouse’s stage whisper. For the first time since she started the vigil, she felt a whisper of hope. Narcissa knew Vincent well and had helped him in the past. She spoke softly.

“Vincent, please look at me. We have a message from Narcissa.”

He turned his head obediently, but said nothing. She gave an inward sigh and read out the message. When she finished, he turned his head back, but she saw him relax slightly. She started slightly when he spoke, his voice rough with disuse.

“Very well. I had better eat a little. It is a long way.”

Catherine looked at the table, where a collection of sandwiches, cakes and other foods had sat since lunch, with added items from supper, some of which might still be warm. William had tried to provide savoury, filling and fragrant food. She loaded a tray with a selection of items and carried it over to Vincent. With a heavy sigh, he sat up and swung his legs around to the floor. He looked at her, as if seeing her for the first time, although his words belied that.

“Catherine, I do not need to be watched. I will not do anything rash. I ... don’t want to cause anyone more pain.”

“Vincent, you aren’t causing pain, except in yourself. We are all worried about you and we want you to be well. You can’t just lie there and expect everyone to ignore you. We love you and want to help.”

“There is no help for me and what I am – and what I have done.”

Catherine saw such anguish on his face that she wanted to hold him close. He stiffened, as if he felt that thought. Then he looked down and picked at the food reluctantly, as if it were a chore, and ate quietly and sparsely, not looking at her. He drank a small amount of juice and closed his eyes.

“Would you like some tea? I can go and get some.”

He looked at her then and his face relaxed a little. His eyes gazed at her with weary affection.

“Yes, thank-you, Catherine. I cannot eat any more.”

Catherine loaded up the tray with all the leftovers and went to the kitchen. William was preparing some snacks for those on sentry duty. He looked at the tray with disgust, but said nothing. She asked him for some tea and he went into the kitchen, returning with another tray, loaded with a large teapot, two cups

and a plate of chocolate brownies still steaming from the oven. Their smell made Catherine's stomach rumble.

"I hope his stomach does that - then maybe he would eat," William said gruffly.

"I think he might. Thank you, William."

When she returned, Vincent was sitting in his chair, the note in his hand. He looked up when she put the tray on the table and his eyes were drawn to the brownies. For the first time in what seemed like weeks, she saw the ghost of a smile as his unique mouth curved up a little.

"William knows me too well," he remarked dryly.

Catherine sat on another chair and watched as he poured them tea, handing her a cup. She sipped carefully, then put the cup on the table and took a brownie, biting into it with care and savouring it with delight. She took another. She saw Vincent reach for one and pretended not to notice.

"New moon," Vincent said quietly. "Why then, I wonder? I cannot refuse. I owe her much."

"I don't think she summoned us to call in old debts, Vincent."

He sighed.

"No. Narcissa watches the spirit world. I have killed many times, and its ghosts haunt me. She knows."

Catherine looked down at her hands. She was hardly blameless in some of those killings he referred to. He had killed to protect her. Vincent must have guessed her thoughts.

"Do not blame yourself, Catherine. I would do it again. You are tired. You should rest."

"Yes. I think I'll go home now and try to sleep. I'll come down early so we can share our tea."

Vincent nodded. "I too must try to sleep."

Catherine got up and, on impulse, quickly planted a kiss on his forehead, just above his nose. Not waiting to see his reaction, she turned and called out a good-night as she went out his door. She heard his hoarse good-night follow her. At least he had got out of bed and talked a little!

The next day, Catherine awakened to broad daylight and looked at the clock. 10 am! Quickly she showered and dressed in jeans and a sweater, grabbed a jacket, put on some sturdy boots and made her way down to the basement threshold. It was too risky going to the park culvert in daylight, although she would have liked to enjoy what looked like a lovely autumn day.

At the bottom of the ladder she turned and was somewhat disappointed not to see Vincent waiting for her. She walked quickly past the sentry post, waving at Brooke, and down the long route to Vincent's chamber. Entering, she found him drying his hair. He turned and saw her, then stopped, as if embarrassed.

"There is our tea on the table, Catherine. It's hot. I slept late."

"So did I, Vincent. But, you have eaten so little ..."

"Do not worry about me. I am sorry you must fast too."

"It won't do me any harm. What shall we do to pass the time today?"

"Father said the children need help carving jack-o-lanterns, so I suggested you and I could help them."

"Does he know..."

"I told him we were visiting Narcissa at sunset."

Catherine nodded. Vincent brushed his hair and then they made their way to the dining chamber. The noise of excited children reached them long before they arrived and Vincent seemed to hesitate. Then he entered straightened his back and Catherine followed him in.

It had been a wonderful distraction, Catherine mused later, back in Vincent's chamber. He had used a felt pen to mark innovative faces and designs on the pumpkins and she had helped the children cut them out. He had said almost nothing, but the children had not noticed, merely offered suggestions.

They seemed to sense that all was still not well with him. Tunnel children, she reflected, were more aware than their counterparts above - and everyone knew each other so well.

Vincent refused to go to the dining hall for lunch or supper, so they sat in his chamber and drank tea. He remained silent, deep in his thoughts, but sat in his chair, getting up occasionally to pace. Catherine watched him but said nothing. He did not acknowledge her, except to thank her for pouring the tea.

Finally he sat down and looked at her directly.

"It is time."

She nodded, wondering how he knew. Another of his remarkable senses, she guessed. He rose, flung his cloak on, and then reached for her hand. Together they made their way through the now quiet tunnels, down stairs and along rough routes and into the Chamber of the Winds. They braced themselves against the winds while Vincent's cloak flew around them like wings.

Catherine looked up at the cathedral arch and took a deep breath. What was this? It looked like a half-finished subway station, but it was far below the existing ones.

Vincent paused briefly in the centre, as if looking for a sign, then led her off to the right. They traversed more tunnels and went down a set of winding stone stairs, emerging at last onto a ledge overlooking a wide, bowl-like chamber. It was filled with tables of oddments and lit candles. In the centre, seated on a large rug, was Narcissa.

"Come children," she called out to them.

They descended the steep stone stairs, Vincent first, and walked over to her. She waved them onto the mat and they sat down facing her.

"No," she admonished them. "Sit facing each other. It is important. The journey you take must be taken together."

They did so and Vincent slipped off his cloak. She rose and walked over to a nearby table, picking up an ornately-carved glass bottle. She poured a clear liquid into two glasses and then carried them over to her guests.

"Drink. It will not harm you. It will only open the way."

Vincent and Catherine held the glasses uncertainly and looked at her.

"Why, Narcissa?" Vincent asked.

Narcissa said nothing for long moments, then sighed.

"There is much blood on your hands, Vincent – and yours, Catherine. Although you did not kill without reason, some spirits are uneasy. The dead need peace, and some do not accept death. You must help the lost ones. On this night, you can make peace with them all and avoid madness."

"Who?" Vincent asked.

"You will see them and know them. They cannot hurt your bodies, but they have a greater weapon – fear in the mind. They must be at peace before All Hallows Eve.

"Now you must drink and hold hands."

Vincent looked at Catherine and she nodded. They drank and gave the glasses to Narcissa. She nodded as they clasped hands.

"Close your eyes and clear your minds. I will be close by."

Catherine tried to clear her mind. Whatever she had to do, or face, she would do so for Vincent. He must be made well. She thought of the Chamber of the Falls and filled her mind with its vastness, let the sound of water rush through her and sweep all thoughts away, leaving nothing.

She found herself standing on a sandy pathway, in a misty light that showed nothing on either side or ahead. She waited.

Vincent tried to empty his mind and think of nothing. He imagined the winds blowing through him, taking

everything away, leaving him clean. He found himself standing behind Catherine, on a sandy pathway, nothing on either side.

“Catherine.”

She turned to see him and smiled. She stretched out her hand and he took it. They walked slowly down the path, anticipating they knew not what.

At first there was utter silence, then gradually they could hear voices, rumbling, high, angry, accusing, despairing. Something seemed to be forming ahead, alongside the path. They kept walking, and the forms became more distinct, ethereal bodies with heads larger than life, on both sides of the path. Some they recognized.

Holding hands tightly, still walking slowly along the path, they watched the wraiths. At last they came up beside the first ones.

Catherine gasped a little. They were the men who had attacked her, and who in turn had been killed by Vincent when he came to her rescue. They stood still now and regarded the two of them. There was no malice on their faces, but they seemed to be waiting. For what, she wondered. Then one of the two, the one who had captured her outside the hotel, spoke.

“See us and know us,” he intoned.

“We know you,” Vincent replied and Catherine nodded. She would never forget them. But something more was needed because they were still waiting. She took a chance.

“You brought us together and together you died,” Catherine told them.

The forms whispered a “thank you” and dispersed.

She looked at Vincent then and he gazed down at her with affection.

“Are we to see all our ... killings, do you think, Vincent.”

“I do not know. Perhaps only those spirits which are unsettled. You did well Catherine.”

They walked on and saw the wraith of Jason, wearing his black outfit, but he let them pass without comment. Looking back, she noticed that he had dispersed. Perhaps he was at peace because he had saved Vincent at the last. She hoped so.

So many, Catherine mused, as they continued, seeing people who had died – the Silks men, the two scientists, the men who used children as pickpockets, the two crooked cops, criminals, innocents.

She had not thought much of it at the time, but she and Vincent had been forced to violence far too often. It made her think. Had she invited it? Had she been careless? Was there another way? Could she say she was justified in what she did, whom she helped, when people had died? She felt Vincent’s hand tighten on hers, and looked ahead of them.

It was the Outsider gang, no doubt about it. They were all together, waiting for them, darkly malevolent, quivering. They reached out their arms as the two came up beside them, but did not try to touch them. Catherine looked at them closely. They looked as dishevelled and dirty as they had been in life, but pitiful rather than dangerous. Even their leader and the big man who had attacked her seemed to be waiting for something. They did not say anything, just swayed and stared at Vincent and herself. What could she say to them? She had to try.

“We saw our darkest fears in your faces,” she hazarded. “We live with the knowledge of what we could become, but for Fate. You died as you had lived – violently.”

Vincent spoke quietly when she finished.

“We thought we knew what you were, that we could extract peace without price. I killed you and took your violence, and my own, into myself. Self-hatred is born of violence and pain. I faced it with Catherine’s love. You have no pain now. Be free.”

The wraiths shook violently and looked at each other. They seemed to lighten, almost to smile. They

dropped their arms, turned and were gone.

Vincent sighed deeply and Catherine looked up at him.

"Perhaps we need reminders of hatred and pain," she whispered, "so that we can value love."

He raised her hand to his mouth and kissed it. Then they walked on.

Two men waited ahead of them and Catherine shivered. These two were a particularly horrible memory, both for what they had done and for what they were. They were products of her own society, one of privilege, yet filled with pretence. Until she met Vincent, she had not realized how little substance her own life had under its glossy veneer.

They drew near to the men, who stood still and regarded them, much as they had in life, with smirks.

"You know us," they said together.

Vincent spoke first. He had been the first witness to their atrocities.

"The women you attracted could not give you love. Their lives were less empty than your own, and harder, but you killed them brutally, seeking something to fill your emptiness. I who killed you, knew what you were, knew that only true necessity and remorse made me different. There is no forgiveness for such as you - and nothing more."

"I know you," Catherine added. "I live in your world, the world of money and privilege. You had no dreams, no compassion, no love. Although you despised and betrayed it, your wealth and position gave you opportunity and immunity – for a while. It could not go on. You chose the place and the time, and you died. You are a lesson to my society that we must not trade our hearts, or those of our children, for wealth. I will remember you."

The two men straightened and their faces relaxed. They looked at Vincent and Catherine, then each other. They slowly dissolved into the mist.

So far, it seemed too easy, Catherine mused to herself. Surely those sad examples of humanity were not the reason for Narcissa's concerns.

Ahead of them lurched another figure, and she recognized Spirko. But neither she nor Vincent had been responsible for his death! She felt Vincent stiffen beside her and looked where he was gazing, on the opposite side of the path, and saw – Paracelsus!

They came up besides the two wraiths, who stood facing each other across the path, their faces mirroring extreme hatred for each other.

"Why are you here?" Catherine addressed Spirko. The answer might give them a clue.

The ghost turned towards her, his rumpled suit quivering. The voice was barely recognizable, but the anger was evident.

"I am dead because I did my job, because I tried to find the truth, expose it."

"No," Catherine answered. "You are dead because you thought to gain fame from someone else's misfortune. You didn't care how you got your story, or whom you hurt in the process. You thought you were clever. Your last associate recognized what you were – but he won and you lost."

Vincent regarded Paracelsus for long moments and Catherine clasped his hand more tightly. When he spoke, it was with sadness.

"You used this man to try and destroy me. You killed this man when he had done what you could not, but before he could expose me. You didn't want me dragged into the world above, you wanted me mad. You wanted Father discredited. You wanted my world destroyed.

"You did not reckon on Catherine, whose love saw through your deception. You never understood love. It was just another means to your ends. And now you are dead and neither love nor hate can affect you. Go."

There was a hideous screech of anger from Paracelsus, and a wail from Spirko, but although Spirko's

wraith wafted away, that of Paracelsus did not.

"Fine words," he told them, his mouth writhing. "How dare you judge me? You and Father - with your petty, holier-than-thou morality! Are you better than me? Whom have you killed in the name of justice?"

Catherine looked at Vincent and questioned him with her eyes. He nodded.

She spoke quietly, but with emphasis.

"What do you know of justice?" she demanded. "Justice may be blind, but it is not without compassion. You have no heart. You have never known love, or understood it. To you it was just something to use, to get you what you wanted – gold, power, acolytes. You wanted respect, but that required more heart than you could give. You despised love, therefore you discounted its ability to overcome and triumph. It's stronger than your hatred - because it's unselfish."

"Love!" screamed the wraith. "Who can truly claim to love! Love is the most selfish emotion of all! It is held within, yet reaches out to capture others, to make them weak. Look at you two, clinging together underground. What example do you set? And you dare to criticize me? At least I know what I am.

"But what are YOU Vincent? You killed me because I goaded you to do so, even as I impersonated Father, someone you claim to love. Is that all it takes to turn you into the beast you resemble - a few harsh truths? You have the veneer of an educated man, but not the soul of one."

Vincent moved a little closer to the ghost, followed by Catherine, and spoke with deep sadness.

"I do not know what I am, but I do know what I am capable of. I also know that I can be blinded by anger like any other man. At such times, I do not see the obvious. Catherine has helped me return to myself, but she could not help me this time. Your fiction about my birth, told as you were disguised as Father, affected me as you had hoped. Narcissa could have told me the truth, but her fear made her meaning unclear, and I assumed the worst.

"But even as I struggled with you, I knew something was wrong. I have not struck out in anger at anyone I loved since I was a boy – and I could never kill. In you, I sensed a darkness worst than mine ... and I knew I had to destroy its source.

"It is over now. I thank you, Paracelsus, for now I know the truth about myself, even though I do not know how I came to be. I will not be driven mad again. Your plots are ended and you have lost ... everything."

"Lost ... lost ..." whined the wraith. It seemed to become hollow in the centre and then exploded outward in a huge burst. Paracelsus was gone.

Catherine relaxed and sighed audibly. She touched Vincent's hand and he turned to look at her, then pulled her to him and hugged her. She wrapped her arms around him and laid her head against his chest. She could feel his heartbeat. He kissed the top of her head and sighed.

They separated after a while and stood on the road side by side again, somewhat surprised that they had not returned to Narcissa's chamber.

"Something remains to be done," Vincent mused. "There perhaps." He pointed ahead.

Catherine looked where he pointed and saw a small misty shape on the right hand side. Her brow wrinkled in puzzlement, but she said nothing as they approached the shape and finally stood next to it. They turned together to look at it.

The shape began to writhe. Arms, legs and a head formed. It was a child, a baby. The baby waved its limbs and its head turned to look at them. Its features, however were formless, indistinct. Nevertheless, Catherine knew instinctively that this was the child she and Vincent could have. She looked up at him and realized he had concluded the same thing. He looked down at her and his mouth twitched wryly.

"Catherine, this apparition is not part of our past, but of a possible future, I think."

"I think this is a promise that we could produce a child, Vincent, if we become ... lovers."

Vincent sighed. "It does not seem to be a warning. Yet there is no face."

"We are not to permitted to know the future, just the possibility, Vincent. Our ghosts have been laid to rest, so perhaps we can move forward," Catherine said softly.

"Yes. We must know if we can have a full life, together. I promise to move towards ... love."

On those last words, the pathway dimmed and they found themselves once more in Narcissa's chamber, still seated and still holding hands. They looked at each other and their eyes shone with love.

Narcissa spoke up from beside them and they looked up at her.

"Well, children, I think you may now celebrate Halloween without any fear of old ghosts – but beware of making new ones."

"There will be no new ones," Catherine promised. Vincent tilted his head and gave her a questioning look.

"I have had time to think while I watched you," she explained quietly. "There may be times when you have to protect the ones you love, but it won't be because of my career. I'm removing myself from the arena."

"Catherine, you can't give up your work!"

"No, I won't give it up – but I can do it other ways. Trust me, it can be done."

Vincent nodded. He had questions, but it was important they get home before someone worried.

"We must leave now, Catherine. It is late on the day before Halloween."

Catherine looked stunned but when she tried to move she grimaced. "Ow, no wonder my ... uh ... fundament aches!"

Vincent chuckled. "Mine too, my love."

Narcissa laughed.

"The spirits have no concern for the comfort of the living, children. Go in peace - and may you find new joys to share."

They rose from the rug, both stiff and awkward and after thanking Narcissa, they made their way back to the home tunnels. They did not speak until they were in Vincent's chamber. They sat with relief on his soft bed and sighed.

"I'm tired," Catherine said at last.

"We must both rest," Vincent agreed. "Catherine, please stay with me tonight. I would like you close."

She looked up at him and smiled. "I think we'll both sleep well after our adventure, but be warned, I won't forget your promise."

He smiled at her. "I know. Nor will I."

She hoped she would be able to sleep thinking about that. After they had both washed and changed into night wear, though, there was no more energy for talk. They snuggled up together in Vincent's big bed and slid quickly into that deep sleep so long denied them.

They awakened to a flurry of pipe messages and looked at each other. It was Halloween morning!

"You must have breakfast with us, Catherine," Vincent pleaded as they reluctantly separated themselves from his bed.

"All right," she agreed. "But I need to freshen up in the guest chamber, and after breakfast I must go back to my apartment and shower and change. I have a costume for tonight, Vincent, and a plan."

"There will be some activities here, Catherine, but only for the children and not until later this afternoon. I suspect everyone was busy while we were away. We usually have a special party in the Great Hall for the adults, after all the children are in bed. That will be around 11 pm. Will that fit in with your plans?"

"Oh yes. You might as well know. There will be a festival in the Park tonight. I remember them from

when I was a child. They'll wrap up by 10 pm though, so we'll still be able to attend the party here. "I have just one request, Vincent. Could you must wear what you did on our first Halloween date?" Vincent nodded. "With pleasure Catherine. Now we must dress and go to breakfast before nothing is left."

Catherine noted that he didn't question his ability to be in public on this special night.

They made a quick toilet, dressed and went to the dining chamber hand in hand. Long before they arrived they could hear a lot of noise and they entered to bedlam. The children were shrieking with delight. Puzzled, Vincent and Catherine looked around to see why. It appeared to be something they were eating.

Father beckoned to them and they sat beside him. He looked a little frazzled. He was not fond of a lot of noise.

"Good morning," he greeted them. "I'm afraid William has outdone himself. The children are eating some horrible-looking concoction based on porridge – and enjoying it immensely, as you can hear. My ears may never recover."

Vincent's curiosity got the better of him and he rose and walked over to the nearest child, which happened to be Kipper. He looked down at the bowl of "porridge" and managed to stifle a gasp. It was gruesome swirl of bright green and orange with dots of dark brown and white. Obviously it tasted much better than it looked, for the children were almost inhaling it.

He returned to Catherine and told her what he had seen. Father sighed.

"Yes, the worse it looks, the better they like it. You both look well-rested, by the way. I hope you'll join us for the adult celebration tonight. William is preparing some special treats."

"Of course, Father. We wouldn't miss it. And all is well with us. Never better."

"Ah, excellent Vincent. We've been worried. You were gone some time, but I'm glad whatever Narcissa did helped."

"Narcissa is wise in the ways of the spirit world, Father. She sees much with those blind eyes and her gifts are beyond price."

"Yes ... well ... I'm glad Vincent. What are your plans for the rest of the day? Have you time to lend a hand with some last minute preparations for the children's party?"

"Of course, Father. Catherine must return above for a few hours, but she will return in time for the party, I'm sure."

"Yes, I'll be here. What time does it start?"

"It'll be about 4 pm., Catherine. The children will play some games, and then eat their supper – if they have any room left – and then we'll have some music and sing some songs among the jack-o-lanterns, tell some stories - and pack them all off to bed. That will leave the rest of us a few hours to prepare for our own party in the Great Hall."

"I wouldn't miss any of it for the world, Father. I'd better get above now, though. I have some preparations of my own to do."

"I'll escort you, Catherine," Vincent offered.

"No need, Vincent. I can find my way. I think you're needed here. I'll be back before 4 pm."

She rose, waved at the assembly and made her way quickly along the tunnels to her threshold. Back in her apartment she sighed with relief, glad this once, to be home. She had work to do.

Over the next couple of hours, she organized her costume and packed it into a small suitcase. She wouldn't put it on until she and Vincent were ready to go into the Park. She hoped the festival was as good as she remembered. She wanted to surprise Vincent with something special.

Catherine looked at the clock and decided she had better phone Joe. He picked up the phone as soon as she was put through.

"Radcliffe? What's up? Hope you're well rested. I need you here."

"Joe, I'm sorry I've been away, but a close friend has been very ill. We need to talk, Joe. I'm going to be busy the rest of today and tonight – it's Halloween, you know – and Wednesday I'll need to do some chores. Could we talk on Thursday? I'll be in the office on time, I promise."

"Radcliffe ... Cathy ... I guess that means I'll have to keep the lid on for two more days. All right, you win. See you Thursday."

"Thanks Joe. Enjoy Halloween."

"Yeah, sure. With what's going on around here, Dante's inferno would be a holiday!"

Catherine chuckled. "If you can still joke about it, Joe, it can't be too bad. Bye."

She spent the next few hours cleaning up her apartment, watering the plants on her balcony and making notes about the upcoming meeting with Joe. Then she put on a long black skirt and orange sweater, draped a string of extra-large sparkly green beads around her neck. Then she pulled on her black boots, grabbed a long black cardigan and her overnight bag and headed for the basement. It was just after 3 pm.

At the bottom of the ladder, she turned to find Vincent and went immediately into his arms.

"It seems like ages since I saw you here," she commented, when he released her.

"That was another time," he remarked. "This is the first day of the rest of our lives, Catherine."

"It sure is," she agreed.

They went hand in hand to the dining hall, where children and adults seemed to be milling around confusedly.

"No, here!" piped up several voices from different parts of the hall.

"What on earth ..." Catherine asked, looking up at Vincent.

He gave her a grin. "I suspect they're looking for something. Suddenly, he tilted his head and then reached down and captured something which dashed out from under a table, catching it in his cloak.

"Let me guess ... Arthur," Catherine sighed.

Mouse dashed over to them from somewhere in a crowd, carrying a small pet carrier. He opened the door and Vincent carefully pushed the squirming form into it, then blocked it while Mouse closed the door.

"I hope you have a raccoon-proof lock, Mouse," Vincent remarked.

"Yes, padlock with key, back in chamber – and bigger cage. This one is too small, but couldn't carry the other one."

"Do you need help with him?" Vincent asked.

"Maybe," Mouse admitted. "Arthur is heavy. Don't want to drop him."

"I'll come with you." Vincent left Catherine with a regretful look and followed Mouse.

William emerged from the kitchen and bellowed across the hall.

"Attention! I have some trays that need to be delivered – if that animal is gone."

"He's gone with Mouse and Vincent," Catherine reported. She helped to carry trays of brightly-coloured snacks to the schoolroom, which had been decorated with a liberal hand. It was draped with fake spider webs and huge paper spiders. Each desk held a lit jack-o-lantern and trays were placed at strategic intervals. One had a contorted collection of lumpy things in garish colours. She raised her eyebrows at it and Mary noticed giving her a rueful smile.

“Those are the candies the children made earlier today. Don’t they look dreadful?”

The desk chairs were in a circle in the middle of the room. A separate set of chairs were at the head of the room.

Hardly had everyone positioned the trays when a enormous clatter in the tunnels announced that the children had been released by Father. They poured into the schoolroom and stopped, looking eagerly around, then slowly walked to the seats and sat down. Father followed them in, smiling.

The next few hours passed too quickly for Catherine.

There were stories – even she and Vincent were asked to relate some spooky ones. She remembered a short one from long ago and recited it with appropriate noises. The children clapped after each one.

Then there was the music. Some Tunnel teenagers had created a small orchestra and when they entered the room the children went silent in anticipation. Obviously, Catherine realized, they knew what was coming. She was amazed as the small group, conducted by Father, beautifully played Mussorsky’s Night on Bald Mountain and then Saint-Saens’ Dance Macabre – both with appropriate percussion, which the children enthusiastically joined, having been given drums and sticks. They were obviously very familiar with the music. There was a huge round of applause when they finished, and Catherine realized the tunnel adults had filed in to listen as well, without her noticing.

After that, Father announced a break to partake of the treats and the schoolroom became organized bedlam as an adult monitored the treats, to make sure everyone got one. Fabric napkins, dry and wet, were liberally used afterwards to clean up the children, who practically inhaled everything, leaving empty trays in no time.

Then came a costume party. Mary and Rebecca brought in several boxes of old clothing and another with ribbons, string, lacing, lace, yarn other oddments. The children rummaged through them and an hour later, with help from adults, were wearing costumes that would have puzzled people in the world above, but which Catherine thought perfect for the tunnel world. Each one was unique – old adult pants and shirts, liberally held up with rope and decorated in innovative ways with ribbons, yarn and even lace. Several children created unique headwear with old hats and coloured yarn hair.

Catherine found herself wishing she had a camera. The children were transformed into gnomes and gremlins, each one a tribute to the imagination that was allowed to flourish in the tunnels. She looked around and noticed that Elizabeth was present, and suspected that some of these would make it onto the tunnel walls.

While this had been going on, desks and chairs were moved and stacked, leaving a huge open space in the middle of the school room. A small group of musicians sat on the few chairs remaining in one corner and started to play jigs on their string instruments, while the children danced wildly in roughly-ordered country dances, their costumes flying about them. The sight was so comical that everyone was soon laughing, including the children.

After a few sets, the musicians stopped playing and the children collapsed to the floor in laughing heaps. Father then called for attention.

“Well children, you’ve certainly made our Halloween special. Now it’s time for supper, if you have any room for it (there were shouts of YES at this), and after that, I’ll read you all a story before bedtime.

And so it was. The adults watched and kept the peace, as they were planning to eat later in the Great Hall. Vincent and Catherine left as Father prepared to tell a story, and returned to Vincent’s chamber. Catherine was now eagerly anticipating their own Halloween activities.

“I’ll go in the guest room and be back in a few minutes. Then we can go up to the Park.”

“I’ll be ready,” Vincent promised as she left, wondering what she had in mind. He was not worried about appearing in public this night, but did take the usual precaution of wearing his black fringed gauntlets. He added a vest to his costume, since it would be chilly outside and his shirt would not be warm enough.

He waited impatiently, and when Catherine finally entered his chamber, his mouth dropped open in surprise.

She had chosen to be, he assumed, Puss-in-Boots. She had acquired a fuzzy cat-like mask, which covered her forehead to below her nose, but left her full mouth free. Her costume consisted of a white frilly blouse, black vest and pants and thigh-high red boots. She also had a full black cloak, against the chill.

Catherine looked at Vincent and saw his amazement. She had hoped he wouldn't be upset at her choice of character.

"What do you think," she asked him at last, when he didn't say anything.

"Catherine, I'm stunned. You look ... good enough to kiss!"

She walked over to him then and lifted her lips to him. He obligingly gave her a somewhat tentative kiss.

"I hope for better than that later," she remarked.

"I don't want to damage your mask," he excused himself.

"Well then, are you ready? We should go out an entrance that is hidden from view."

"Of course, Catherine. We'll use the one that Laura uses. It's comes out in a well-hidden culvert near the fairground."

"Perfect, Vincent. Let's go!"

She took his hand and he led them along tunnels and up stairways, over the Whispering Bridge, and along maintenance routes until they reached a stone wall. Vincent pressed a lever down and the wall slid aside, almost noiselessly. They quickly exited and the door closed on its own. They were in a small junction and Vincent led them along a sandy culvert that made an abrupt right angle turn. They emerged behind a earthen bank masked by trees. Catherine could hear traffic nearby. Vincent led them to a pathway and they walked along it until they could hear sounds of merriment. He paused then.

Catherine looked at him and realized he was a little apprehensive. She squeezed his hand and he looked down at her. He made a visible effort to straighten his shoulders and then led her into the festival area.

There were a lot of booths set up to sell Halloween souvenirs and food, and several offered carnival games. Catherine took the lead then, and led them to one she had planned.

Vincent looked at it with amazement. The booth sold ice cream in 25 flavours.

"I wanted you to have an ice cream," Catherine said softly. She reached into a pocket of her vest and led him to the booth. The vendor looked at them both and smiled.

"Cool cats!" he remarked. "What do you dig?"

Catherine giggled when she saw Vincent's eyebrows raise and chose a Neopolitan swirl. After a long pause, Vincent chose chocolate. They were given two large scoops in a double cone. They walked a little away from the festivities and sat on a bench to eat their cones.

Vincent ate his with obvious relish. He looked at Catherine and she regarded him with joy over her own cone.

"I've wanted you to have an ice cream ever since that time you visited me in hospital. Do you remember? I had a dream about us?"

"I remember, Catherine. This is ... exquisite – a dream come true."

"Well, it isn't 5th Avenue, but there are a lot of people."

"Yes, and their costumes make ours look restrained."

Catherine laughed as a very lumpy greenish creature with too many eyes walked past them. He – or she – heard her laugh and turned and waved at them, giving a very muffled "Happy Halloween".

They waved back and Vincent relaxed at last. Catherine took his free hand in hers and squeezed it.

"I love you so much," she confessed quietly. "You surprise me constantly, not just that you exist, but that you love me. You take the world as it comes, even on such a night as this."

Vincent looked at her with a glint in his eye.

"Catherine, you have brought me into the light. I am changed. Outwardly, I am what I am, but my heart and soul belong to you. I hardly recognize myself."

"And what a sight for sore eyes you two are!" boomed out a familiar voice, albeit with a slight lisp.

They looked up to see a very tall Count Dracula in a full tuxedo and sporting an impressive pair of fangs.

"Peter?" Catherine and Vincent said together.

"How anyone can talk around these things I'll never know," Peter commented wryly. "And eating is out of the question. I'd dissect my tongue!"

Vincent laughed, showing his own teeth to good advantage. He was completely at ease.

"Perhaps you just need elocution lessons - or more realistic canines," Vincent commented.

"No doubt you would be a good teacher, but you aren't scary enough for this crowd," Peter shot back.

"How long are you planning on being out here tonight?"

"Just until it is time for the party at home," Vincent replied. "You should join us, Peter. I'm sure there will be enough food and drink for one more."

"You know, that's an offer I just might take you up on. I was going to go to a movie, but I'd much rather surprise Jacob."

"I think you'll do that all right," Catherine laughed. "What's worth seeing here tonight? We don't want to miss anything special."

"Don't ask me, kids. I like just strolling around and eyeballing the costumes. Carnivals are fine, but my office resembles that every day. But don't let me discourage you two."

"You couldn't, Peter, but to be honest, it is a bit noisy over there. Would you like to stroll around, Vincent?"

"Yes. I too would like to see the costumes."

The three of them set off along the pathways and were soon smiling at fellow revellers. Peter was right, though, they did not elicit more than a wave and a smile from anyone. Many were creatures from science fiction movies and TV shows. Vincent looked at them all with amazement and some puzzlement, since he was unaware of the references.

They had almost returned to their starting point when there was a sudden hush and they saw that a crowd had gathered around a roped off sandy area. Dark figures were moving around the sand and moments later, a circle of Catherine wheels lit up, casting coloured sparks in all directions. They were followed by rockets which burst overhead in green and orange stars, embellished with deep booms which shook the ground.

Vincent pulled Catherine to him and held her in front of him, hugging her gently.

"I've never been so close to fireworks," he whispered in her ear.

She looked up at him and smiled. Peter, standing next to them, was equally enthralled. There were many ooohs and aaahs as the display became more complex. Then there was a massive grande finale that left their ears ringing and their eyes seeing stars.

"Well, I don't think anything can beat that," Peter commented at last. "If the dead were asleep, they're not anymore. I could use some of William's beer. Shall we?"

"Yes," Vincent replied. "I think we should perhaps use a way less travelled, Peter."

"Lead on, then."

Vincent took Catherine's hand and led them along a path that went deep into the park. After a few minutes, there were no more sounds from the festival and the deep darkness of the night settled around

them. Their footsteps sounded loudly on the pathway, but Vincent soon led them off it onto the grass. He went slowly and although he said nothing, they knew he was listening for any possible intruders nearby. A few minutes later, he brought them to a concrete structure, which looked like a utility hut. He paused, and led them around to the back and where the structure met a steep bank, he bent over slightly and waited. A deeper black grew in front of him and Vincent led them quickly into a tunnel and pushed down a lever. A wall rose silently behind them from the floor to the roof of the tunnel.

"Well," commented Peter. "I'll bet that entry is even better in daylight."

"We never use it then," Vincent told him. "The risk is too great."

There was a dim light which gradually got brighter as they neared the more familiar tunnels. Soon they could hear tapping on the pipes and abruptly they all stopped and listened.

"We can go straight to the Great Hall," Vincent commented.

"Is it that late already?" Catherine asked. "Time goes quickly when you're having fun!"

"I think you will find fun – and more - awaiting us," Vincent said, as he led them down the long stairway to the Great Hall, whose big doors were open wide, emitting a lovely smell of food and the sounds of musicians tuning their instruments.

Once inside, Peter waved at the other two and went to find Father. He found him ensconced in an old armchair by a long brazier. The Hall was chilly, but dancing always warmed everyone up. Father always declined to participate in that, however, citing his leg. In reality, he simply did not like dancing.

Vincent and Catherine made their way to the food table and quickly filled up a plate with pasties and condiments. Catherine carried their plates while Vincent carried two large mugs of ale. They sat down in a group which included Mary and Rebecca

"Wow, your costumes are terrific!" Rebecca exclaimed.

Vincent chuckled. "Thank you, Rebecca, but you know very well that I am not in disguise."

"Must be the company you keep, then, Vincent. You look different ... somehow."

"He's too modest," Catherine commented, looking up at him and catching his eye. I'm sure I was the envy of half the women in the park. I saw their expressions. Most of them were squired by aliens or cowboys."

Rebecca laughed and Vincent joined her. Catherine decided she wanted to hear more of his laugh, which she had heard for only the second time that night.

They ate in silence for a while, listening to the music begin and thinking. Catherine was sure she could feel Vincent's emotions along their bond and they were not reflecting what was happening in the Great Hall. She took his hand when they were both finished eating and got his attention.

"Vincent, would you like to dance?"

He looked down at her with an embarrassed expression.

"Of course, Catherine. I apologize. My mind was ... elsewhere."

She was sure his mind was not far away, and gently led him to the centre of the Hall, where one or two couples had started to dance. The music immediately changed to something with a slower beat, and Vincent looked at the musicians suspiciously. He took Catherine in his arms and led her on a stately tour of the floor. When an even slower beat began a few sets later, he pulled her closer to him and she rested her head against his chest.

This was heaven, she thought, knowing Vincent would feel her contentment. She knew instinctively that he felt the same way. They moved slowly among the other couples until bumped by someone. Catherine opened her eyes and saw Peter grinning and Mary looking apologetic.

"I don't think you two could get closer in a vertical position," he remarked.

"Peter!" Mary protested. "Leave them alone. They get so few chances to be together."

“Nevertheless, do you think we could switch partners?” Peter asked. “I’d like one dance with my favourite lawyer.”

Vincent and Catherine separated with good grace and Peter took Catherine in a faster dance, since the music had mysteriously become faster again. Catherine now looked suspiciously at the musicians in her turn, but said nothing.

“Well Cathy, you look like the cat which swallowed the canary!” he remarked. “I hope all is well with you two.”

“Never better,” she told him quietly. “Vincent is my life and I am his ... but there must be changes. I have plans, Peter.”

“Ah, I wanted to talk to you about plans. How would you like a brownstone to live in? So happens I know of one. It was an investment your dad and I made some years ago. You know it – the one that you borrowed for a few days.”

Catherine looked up at him. “You mean the one where that woman I was protecting was killed?”

“Yes. It so happened we ran into your friend shortly afterwards at a charity event. She wanted to sell it, and we offered her a very good price. We registered it to a shell company, and when your dad died, it became mine.”

Catherine was silent for long moments and Peter watched her brows knit slightly. She was perturbed.

“Why didn’t you two tell me? Why didn’t she?”

“We asked her to just say that she’d sold it. We didn’t want you to feel that we were cleaning up after you. It’s a good solid structure and it deserves another chance. I’ve been using it to store records, but I’ll make other arrangements. I believe there’s even a possible tunnel entry. Your dad never knew Vincent, of course, and I didn’t know you knew Vincent then. It seems very opportune now.”

“Peter – are you suggesting that Vincent and I live there?”

“Well, why not, Cathy? He deserves to live with you in as normal a way as possible. He could keep his chamber down here and still participate in the community as he does now – but he would also have a home above, with you.”

“I ... I hadn’t thought along those lines, Peter, but you’re right. I am planning some changes in my working life. I don’t want to be on the front lines and I have to think of Vincent. I can’t put him at risk anymore. The brownstone might allow me room for an office, so I could pick and choose what I do for Joe.”

“I’m sure you’ll be able to work something out, Cathy. Joe isn’t an unreasonable guy - and he wants you on his team, I know. If you need me to put in a word as your doctor, I’d be happy to.”

“I’ll keep that in reserve just in case, Peter. Thank-you.”

They were now in front of Father again, and Peter begged leave to sit down. Catherine confessed to needing a rest too and they sat on either side of Father, who was looking tired. He’d had a busy day.

Vincent was dancing with Mary and sensed that Peter had said something to Catherine that had made her happy. His curiosity finally got the better of him and he swung Mary around until they were near the others.

“I think I’d like to rest a bit, Mary,” Vincent remarked.

“Nonsense, Vincent. You can’t fool me. But I think that you’d better sit with Catherine or you’ll never get off the dance floor.”

Vincent chuckled and bowed to her. He pulled up a chair and sat next to Catherine. He noticed, with surprise, that the party seemed to be winding down a bit. He hadn’t realized how much time had passed. Many people had chores to do the next day, so midnight parties were only indulged in rarely. He looked at Catherine and she gave him a speculative look.

“What?” he asked.

“I think this had better keep until we’re alone and have time to discuss things, Vincent. It’s very good news – just the first such, I hope.”

Father rose and announced he was going to bed, thereby giving several older people the excuse to do the same. Before long, the Hall was empty but for a few young couples. Vincent and Catherine said their good-byes at that point and made their way to his chamber.

Catherine stood uncertainly near the table and looked at Vincent. He smiled at her.

“Please stay, Catherine. I don’t promise you anything ... I don’t know if I can ... but I am willing, if you are.”

Catherine heaved a sigh of relief and began to peel off her costume. Vincent watched for a few moments then turned away embarrassed. He quickly undressed in the shadows and put on his nightshirt. When he turned back, Catherine was wearing a slinky gown.

They moved together and hugging tightly for long minutes. Both were aroused and both knew it. Vincent gently steered Catherine to his bed and they climbed under the covers, separating only long enough, after a few minutes, to remove their encumbering night attire.

They slowly explored each other until both were gasping with desire. The finale made their bond hum between them, and both knew there could be no more secrets.

Catherine’s last sleepy thought was that she wanted more of him and was glad she had taken the next day off. Vincent sighed with happiness and inwardly thanked Narcissa for putting to rest all ghosts and demons. He had been gifted with the clarity of mind to enjoy a fine ending to a wonderful day. They slid into a dreamless sleep, spooned together.

In her chamber far below, Narcissa smiled to herself.

END