

One Hundred

by Angie

Memory and desire stirring ...

- George Eliot

Minus 100 seconds:

"Eve I'm sorry, I'm going to have to call you tomorrow.."

Zero:

Cathy is aware of nothing but pain. She feels herself suddenly airborne and knows they've finished with her. Then she hits the ground and pain ends.

100 seconds

A cloaked figure runs to the body, turns it over, sees a woman, her face a mass of blood and cuts, then realizes she is still alive. He looks at the culvert entrance, and carefully lifts her onto his padded shoulder. He will need both hands on the journey. He belatedly notices her shoes and stoops to pick them up. He puts them in an inside pocket of his cloak and begins the long route downwards to home.

100 minutes:

Father sighs deeply as he clips the last suture thread, then puts down the scissors, and needle. He looks down at his handiwork, the network of neat black stitches across the woman's face, closing the terrible cuts. He wonders how any man could slash a woman this way. Then he looks across the operating table at Vincent, who is holding the woman's hand. He knows his son is willing her to live, to be strong. She will need that strength.

Vincent looks up at last and Father nods and gives him a grim smile.

"I've done all I can. Now we must bandage her face. Thank goodness she's unconscious."

The two men carefully wrap the woman's face in a clean bandage, making it firm but not tight against the sutures. They leave no openings, except her mouth, and tuck the end neatly behind her head, securing it well under the layers.

Then they wrap her cracked ribs in wide stretch bandage. She will have to remain in bed for some days. Father knows that Vincent will want to care for her in his chamber.

100 days:

Catherine has been assured that she is healing well. Her scars are closed now, but the plastic surgeon has warned her that the hairline marks will not disappear, but will be visible only in certain light, close up. She must not expose her face to the sun or the long scars will gleam like a roadmap.

She almost smiles at that. The man who saved her life lives where there is no sun, for he must hide his face from the daylight world she knows.

She sighs and wonders when she will see him again. Waiting has been difficult, but now that her face is almost healed, she must begin the planning for her future. She knows what she will do. Another week and she will start putting her plan into action, make a new beginning.

She left New York to heal, not wanting to see the sympathy and shock in the eyes of her friends. Her father suggested a small sanatorium and she gladly agreed to his arrangement. He had been her only visitor. They were kind here, the food was good and she was able to walk the grounds for exercise. Best of all, she knew no one.

She would pack tomorrow and go home to her apartment. She couldn't wait to get back to New York. She was looking forward to rejoining the world.

100 weeks:

Held in Vincent's arms, in the dark, silent Park, all Catherine's fears and doubts were now gone. This was the man she wanted to be with forever, whatever that entailed. There could be no one else for her, no life for her without him in it.

She could feel his breath on her hair. They separated a little and she looked into his eyes. With a thrill, she felt his resolve, twin to her own, and saw the passion in his eyes. Their lips met slowly and they held the kiss for long moments. A silent promise passed between them as they parted, and both sighed deeply as they embraced again. Nothing mattered but their love now. Nothing.

100 months:

It is their anniversary, the eighth year since Vincent found her in the Park. Catherine looks across the room at the man she loves and sees her world reflected in his eyes. She has made a life for him in the brownstone, for them both. This place has become the threshold between their worlds, mingled them, enriched them - and given them a fulfillment unimagined in those long ago days, when they met on her balcony to talk.

Now, uncloaked and sitting in a comfortable chair, he reads to her before the fireplace in the den. Their world is calm, dedicated to the people they love.

100 years:

Jacob's son gazes in the Mirror Pool, aware that his grandfather often did this when he wanted to meditate. They look much alike. It seems that every generation will have someone who resembles Vincent. Perhaps it is necessary, to ensure that the tunnel world can give sanctuary to those who are different, in ways the world above could not imagine.

Their world has overcome much over the years, but its people still treasure and nurture their communal life and work to keep them all separate, yet linked to the world above, helping those they can.

They had been forced to abandon the tunnels directly below the great City above their heads and expand their network below the Park and into other areas where the every higher - and deeper - towers would not threaten them.

They reached the old haunts of Paracelsus, but use that place for recreation, training sentries, and parties. The Great Hall is used only once a year, at Winterfest. The route to it is much longer now, but at least they did not have to abandon it.

The sound of the subway rains is now more distant, but the pipes still transmit the minutiae of their lives, as they always have. Their communication system is now overseen by Pascal's children and grandchildren.

Vincent's grandson wants to mark this time, this 100th anniversary, with something special. He considers and discards ideas as he sits before the Pool.

Some years ago, the Council had unanimously agreed to date their history from when Father joined the tunnel community, a time that defined them, especially when John Pater left.

Without Jacob Wells, Vincent might have had a very different life, and would not have become their heart and soul - and brought himself and them the love of a special woman from above.

The intervening years were challenging, but the community remained true to its ideals. The brownstone where Vincent and Catherine had lived was still their gateway to the world above, a meeting place, a beginning.

The couple had passed away, hand in hand, just hours ago, after a long life of love and joy, together always.

The man felt a sob rise in him as he thought of them. The bond with his grandparents was gone, and he needed desperately to fill that empty place in his heart. His father, Jacob, sat silent and unmoving, in the big chair in the chamber that had been his father's. He was too quiet, too alone.

Anniversaries had not meant much to Vincent and Catherine. They had always celebrated their own quietly. Their love was enduring and encompassed everyone. They never questioned it, never faltered in their commitment to the tunnel world.

Vincent's grandson sighed and raised his head to the opening above the pool, where the bright sparks of stars twinkled, and glittered like gems in the still, dark Pool.

Then, he knew what they must do. There was only one thing that would recognize both the importance of this Anniversary, coming as it did on the heels of their great loss. They needed closure, of course, but also something to give them strength and hope.

Everyone must come here, he decided, to the place where they traditionally said goodbye to those who had passed away, committing letters to the flames and the long chimney to the stars.

But this time they must do more. They must read their messages aloud, before burning them. They must reminisce, share the sorrows and the joys, hug and cry together. Then they must raise their eyes to the stars and look to the future.

That would be the greatest recognition of the two people they must now live without. They must work through the coming days together, do what they could to do to continue the greatest legacy of all.

They must move from sorrow forwards into more joy and love.

END