

Vignettes – Webs

by Angie

10. Dark Spirit

Comforted in Vincent's arms, the shell reduced to powder, Catherine mourned the loss of her innocence. Not since that terrible moment when she had taken off her bandages below had she so upset Vincent. Even now, even knowing the state of her mind that night, her insane fear, she didn't understand how she could have thrown those terrible words at him. She knew they had hit him like a sledgehammer. Even in her state, she had seen that. Yet he had not abandoned her and had later rescued her.

How could he stand to hold her like this? She wanted and needed him like never before, but the memory wouldn't let her relax. How could she make it up to him? Was that even possible?

She looked up at him then and found his eyes regarding her with all his innate serenity. He must have caught her despair, though, because he spoke softly, carefully.

"Do not let it trouble you, Catherine. There is no shame. I knew the truth, even then. Your fear trapped you in a web of horror, but your heart remained true ... to me."

Catherine sighed and rested her head against his chest. She could think of no reply. Words were inadequate.

She spared a small prayer of thanks to whatever fates had brought them together and then allowed them the gift of their bond. Even though she could not feel it as deeply as Vincent did, she knew the peace she felt in his presence must originate with it. She had never felt so comfortable with anyone else. He enveloped her, warmed her, gave her courage. Thoughts of him held back the dark shadows that sometimes seemed to fill her mind at work.

She stretched her arms as far around him as she could, hugged him to her, wanting the feel of his warmth her whole length. He drew himself closer without hesitation and wrapped his cloak around her, making them one, a cocoon against the world.

How she wished she could stay there forever. At least she knew that he had forgiven her. There would be many more hugs like this in her future. That thought gave her peace.

Walking back through the park, having left Catherine as the first tints of sunrise warmed the horizon, Vincent reached the culvert and gave one last look at her balcony.

He was no stranger to the effects of horror - being what he was - but what Catherine had endured was beyond even his experience. She had been trapped, caught in something so dark that she had been unable to escape, her rational mind subdued. He had felt her fear along their bond, responded to it. But at the last, it was her sudden drugged awareness of danger that had led him to her.

That had been too close. She would have died if he had been just a little slower. He had taken out his disgust on that horrible altar and left the room aflame, not caring what happened to the two people, the ones who had trapped her. In his mind, they deserved no better. Clean fire would remove the evidence of their rituals as it burned away the hold over her as well.

She had let him take the shell and he had crushed it. He knew she was ashamed of her words to him. He had been shocked, but he had not let them hurt him deeply. He knew her heart as he knew his own. Their bond had told him the truth - and he told her so as he hugged her.

He had felt her relax at last, hug him closer than ever before. They both needed that connection, that touching, a confirmation that they were bound together against the world.

The world seemed determined to challenge their love, he reflected with a sigh. But they were both strong - and their bond had become a lifeline, wrapping them in peace when they were together. Nothing, he realized, could really come between them.

That thought made him sigh and he was deeply content as he made his way back to his chamber.

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