

Vignettes – Webs

by Angie

11. An Impossible Silence

Strength. The word had taken on new meaning since he met Catherine.

Vincent had always considered strength something physical, a property of his muscles, often called upon - and gladly offered to those in his world.

But Catherine had showed him the importance of inner strength, of spirit, and he sensed it also in Laura. Like Catherine, Laura was determined to work in the world above on her own terms. Vincent supposed he envied them both. They could do so, albeit at a cost to themselves - but he could not. What would he give to be able to? There were no terms under which the world above would accept him and still allow his freedom, except that brief amnesty for creatures of the dark one night a year.

Yet, he was not unhappy. His bond with Catherine meant that he could feel, albeit vicariously, the sense of her world, its web of life - and death. Her world was so complex, that at times it baffled him. There were too many obscure relationships for him to grasp. Catherine lived in that world and understood it. Perhaps he couldn't even if he lived there.

His world was so much simpler, their lives concerned with each other and survival. The only mazes were the stone tunnels they lived in. His family were all connected by the pipes, knew each other well, yet accepted and assimilated needy newcomers. People in the world above seemed to be always struggling, with themselves, with others, trying to wrest something they needed from that world.

Laura knew that her challenges meant she would not always be accepted with sympathy above - not that she wanted it. But she could also be regarded as something less than perfect - and that would rankle.

Yet still Laura was determined to try and live above. It offered her what the tunnel world could not - people she didn't know, daylight, weather, growing things. No, he could not blame her for wanting those things.

He did not really envy Catherine and Laura, when he considered the world above. They both valued his world for its relative simplicity - as he should too.

Catherine gazed over the Park from her balcony, as she did almost every night now, whether Vincent was with her or not. She knew of the secret world beneath it, and now she knew that it too had its challenges, its sorrows.

Laura had an enviable bravery and strength. Catherine knew her own life, until she met Vincent, had been not unlike Laura's - protected loved, unchanging. While not disabled, Catherine had been, in her way, blind and deaf to much that went on outside her social network - which also seemed to be determined to keep her that way. She had been enmeshed in a golden web of privilege - and really didn't question it.

Somehow, Laura's exposure to the violence above, and her own kidnapping, had reinforced a need to see more of Catherine's world. She had seen something of value, even though some of it must have been overwhelming after the simple world of the tunnels.

Catherine was the first to admit that her world was complicated. In daylight, it was a riot of colours, people, cars, noise, stink and confusion. Yet there was beauty too - sunlight, the Park, islands of calm and peace. Laura wanted to experience it all. That gave Catherine hope.

Yet Laura was a child of the world below. What would she find to replace that wonderful web of love and kindness that had allowed her to grow and meet the challenges of her deafness? She would need friends above, people who accepted her for what she was.

Of course Laura would know she could return to the tunnels any time, but she would not want to do that, except in dire need. Catherine knew that without question. Just as she could not return to her father's law firm after her trauma. She needed a new start, and so perhaps did Laura.

All Catherine could do was wish her well, wish her happiness.

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