

Vignettes – Webs

by Angie

8. Nor Iron Bars a Cage

Catherine finished reading *“Surprised by Joy”* and sighed. She looked up at Vincent, who was regarding her with such an intense look that she felt her face flush. He seemed to realize it, and relaxed slightly.

“Forgive me, Catherine,” he said at last, in a hoarse whisper.

Her expression got serious. “There’s only one thing to forgive, Vincent,” she replied softly.

She saw the question in his eyes and answered it.

“Promise me you will never despair like that again. I could feel your pain, your desire for death. It drove me frantic. I feared I wouldn’t reach you in time.”

Vincent looked down at his hands. “I thought I’d lost you, Catherine. You were going where I could not follow. I could see no reason to go on living.”

“But our connection ... our bond, Vincent. You would not have lost me, any more than I could lose you.”

“No, that would remain, but it would not be enough. It would be torture, Catherine, like a hungry spider who feels a raindrop on his web, but knows it is only water. I would not have been able to see you, talk to you, hold your hand, hug you. My world had shrunk, back to what it had been before the night I found you.”

“But you are no longer that person,” she finished for him.

“No. In my despair, I realized - too well - that what Father warned was true.”

“What was that?” she asked softly.

“That if I was caught above, I would be trapped and prodded and caged, until I wished I were dead.”

“Yet, it was Father who told me you were missing. He did not give up hope you would be found, and neither could I.”

“I did not believe anyone could find me. I had lost faith.”

Catherine sighed. “I can no more leave New York than you. I don’t want to lose you, or give up what we have. I’ll promise that, Vincent.”

“Catherine, I don’t know what our future holds, but I will not wish for death again. I promise.”

She rose from the chair and put out her arms to him. He rose to meet her and held her as if he could never let her go.

When they parted at last, Vincent was in a state of mind he couldn’t identify. Yes, he was glad to have been rescued, happy that Catherine would not now leave New York. But something bothered him.

Yes, the weakness of mind that had put him at risk now gave him pause. He should be made of stronger stuff by now. He wasn’t a child. He knew his limitations - none better.

Yes, losing Catherine had unhinged him, but that did not explain the whole depth of his despair. He had lost faith in those he loved, but he had also been selfish. He wanted her close by, despite what he had told her. He had failed himself, proven his careful aloofness to be a lie. And he had lied to her. That last was unforgivable.

More, he realized that his love for her could not be denied any longer. She realized it too. They had not

spoken of it, but they did not need to. They understood each other without words.

She had felt his despair! That proved their bond was not just one-sided, as he had always assumed. His emotions were strong, so perhaps he had projected them, or Catherine had unconsciously reached out to him.

Obviously, Catherine had come to a conclusion about her job, and that worried him. He had not wanted her to change her life because of him. He had no choice but to love her, to know what she was feeling, to want her with him. It was as natural as breathing. He felt her spirit around his heart, a balm that was unlike any he had known. But now he knew that she would never willingly hurt him, not matter what the cost to herself.

Vincent sighed deeply and closed his eyes.

Father might not approve of their friendship, but he had approached Catherine for help, even if out of desperation. More, he had realized the extent of their ignorance and separation from the world above. There were simply things they could not do, much less understand. Catherine was their agent in those situations. She had not hesitated to help - and she had found him.

Their bond was now more important than ever. It was his lifeline, a link to the woman he loved. But for Catherine too, it had blossomed. She wanted to be close to him and now she knew what he was capable of. That was a little embarrassing ... but also wonderful. There was no need to disseminate now. Their connection was strong, and growing stronger.

He truly did not know where their ... love ... would, could go, but denial was pointless. He had the right to enjoy it and wish for what other men had.

Yes, even that, perhaps, one day.

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