

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE ... ISN'T IT?

by Annie Medlock

(from *MASQUERADES* '93)

Vincent picked up the hastily scribbled note and attempted to decipher it. '*GONE DEEP. WORKING. BE BACK....*' At this point the ink had smudged. He squinted, pondering the word. "Aha... 'tomorrow'!" An arrow directed the phonetic message over the page, and on the reverse side an untidily scrawled adage stated simply; '*OR DAY AFTER- FOR SURE!*' Vincent chuckled warmly to himself. '*Typical!*'

It was very important to find the exact spot of this latest Top Secret project; similar projects had been undertaken in the past and failed, that was true, but ... this one was better... '*tech*' had improved and, like Father used to say, '*learn from mistakes,*' he knew!

Success with this would mean power for the whole community ... for everything and anything... no more use for candles, torches... just flick a switch and... Only problem... had to be a special kind of waterfall, and close enough to tap into existing pipelines, yet far enough from prying eyes and kids' itchy fingers. Plans had been drawn, all parts procured and ready for assembly on arrival. Now the quest led Below... far Below...

The journey thus far had taken the best part of a day, each one hundred metre stretch of tunnel having to be travelled at least three times depending on terrain, whether or not he was able to drag a couple, or could carry only one of the several awkward bundles of stuff required for the job. Although it'd taken a deal longer than he'd estimated, he was pleased with his labours, rewarding himself by stopping to make camp. In order to cut down unnecessary weight, food rations were to a minimum and from somewhere beneath a jumble of tools, he fished out a battered metal lunchbox. Hidden inside was a can, and a stale potato cake, which he broke in two before hacking open the ringpull-less pepsi. Eagerly he dunked one half of the grey-white and green flecked dough into the fizzy liquid.

He had hoped to have found the right place by now, but no matter, he knew it must be close... he could feel it in his bones. The sheer thrill of an expedition always worked as a drug for him. The heady intoxication of it made it difficult for him to sleep... so. well before the sun had chance to rise again, he was gone....

"Vincent! Would you ask the children to root out all the old candle stubs they can find?" Rebecca tutted at what the tunnel world was coming to.... "Tallow's all about done!" Less and less Topsiders used candles these days, even for romantic meals. She snickered. "Ha! Those dimmer things... not the same. That damned electricity will be the death of us all!"

"But I am a little worried, more than a little worried, Pascal... the note said he'd be back, day after tomorrow... that was three days ago!"

"Yes, but you know what he's like, Vincent... or you should, by now!" Pascal reasoned amiably. "He gets caught up in whatever he's working on... it carries him away..." It struck Pascal that he was constantly smoothing the way for this one. He continued, striving to raise his large friend's spirit.

"Father used to tell us he'd grow out of it... it was just a phase... You remember, Vincent?" He fell quiet, smiling fondly at the recollection. Unfortunately, Vincent had grown wise to Pascal's subtle focus-shifters over the years, and he was genuinely distressed.

A sense of foreboding creased his brow. He snapped, the agitation clear. ***"I have no time for memories... I must hurry."*** With the curt dismissal, he vanished along an intersection and into the blackness, leaving Pascal standing mutely, scratching his head.

The little pipesman shrugged wearily and breathed a resigned sigh. "Okay... Vincent? Hey, Vincent! Wait for me..."

The bearing tripod arrangement, constructed of 'salvaged' scaffold poles cobbled together by a varied assortment of clamps, wires and primitive hole-and-plug devices, had been pretty stable up until now.... Though, it had shifted ever so slightly when the first block of heavy machinery had been slung into place. But it was okay, fine when he'd fixed it, kicking a handy wedge of shale beneath the wobbly tripod leg; so, he'd gone ahead joyfully...

'... Why worry something might happen, before it happens? Only wastes time... and if something's going to happen, you need all the time you can get, right?'

This philosophy had been much bandied with the old man, back in the old days, but never had Father won the discussion...

Father hated to lose a debate. The story he most often told when he was disgruntled was the fable, concerning the camel and the final straw... *'In this case it would've been very apt,'* the young man thought, with detached observation, as he swung lazily to and fro above the yawning jaws of the angry waterforce, twirling graceful arcs through the decidedly chilly air...

Item after item had been placed on the tripod's cradle preparatory to be winched down onto a jutting ledge... *'the exact spot'...* however, the last piece, a small wrench, proved to be the final straw and as the cradle gave an ominous groan, the beam arm from which it was suspended lurched crazily in slo-mo over the edge of the precipitous drop, threatening to throw itself into the depths of the embroiling malestrom below. The boy dived, grabbing wildly at the precious load intending to haul it back to safety, but the added weight only made things worse...

And now, here he was... dangling like a forgotten halloween lantern, with no hope of getting back to solid ground. One by one the desperately clinging fingers cramped and gave out, tendons twanging like the fibres of a fraying rope... the future looked pretty bleak.

"Okay... any time now," he squeaked, shutting his eyes tight. No shadow of doubt... he was going to fall, but... didn't have to see where, did he?

As the last traitorous digit succumbed and he began to plummet, he became aware of a defiant, bloodcurdling scream. For a split second it occurred to him that it might just be himself, calling out unconsciously... but when he felt the thud in his side, then the breath squeezed from his lungs he realized it wasn't.

A resonant voice boomed anxiously in his ear. "Are you hurt?"

Momentarily stunned and speechless, he gave a ragged shake of his head and slowly opened his eyes. When he spoke, it was barely audible.

"No...okay, thanks."

... What else was there to say? He could feel a strange passion - subdued anger tempered by grave concern... and something unfamiliar to him - all bubbling within the big man's chest, paralyzing his heart. Pascal felt something of it too, he tapped Vincent's arm to offer a gentle caution.

"Vincent. Father... and Devin... remember? The boy's fine, let's just... go home." And he turned, playing the diplomat in making the first move.

Initially, Vincent remained solidly rooted, wanting to comply... knowing the wisdom of Pascal's words, yet at the same time struggling with an intense desire to yell at the boy, or worse, for being so reckless; to find release for the burning pent-up anger and overwhelming fear of losing something beyond price, beyond measure... an emotion he'd kept captive by an iron will, since that last time... *'Dear God, was it really so long ago?'*

Finally, to the young man's obvious relief, Vincent sighed heavily. Turning to follow Pascal's lead, he held out a welcoming arm for the boy, who accepted the invitation gratefully and trotted into the safe harbour of the embrace... remorse, apology and undying love radiating from the guileless blue eyes. Suddenly, he gasped.

"Maybe... solar thingy, above the mirror pool..." A contingency plan began to formulate and the moment was lost.

Vincent hugged the young man to him, and smiled at last... muttering with deep affection.

"Y'know, Jacob... it's a wise Father, that knows his own child..."

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