

Darkness

By Cindy Rae

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Vincent: "May I lead you through the dark?"

Catherine: "There is no darkness, Vincent, when you're with me."

~ Dead of Winter

I was a child, once. And as a child, I had a child's fears. I was afraid of rats. (Because if you live in New York, tales of giant rats are legendary.) I was afraid that one day, there would be an alligator in the bathroom. I know that sounds silly, now, but once...

I was afraid of wearing the wrong clothes to school. – In case you were wondering why I still have a wardrobe that would make Bergdorf's blush. I discovered that in my father's circles, you could be wrong, but you could never look wrong. It was a thing.

I was afraid of disappointing my father, and in more ways than one. Of getting hit by a taxi, of criticism, of a mean girl at my school. I suppose if you list it all, I look like I was afraid of many things, back then. Back in childhood, when all our fears loom large.

But really, I was afraid of only one: Darkness.

For New York, you see, is the city that never sleeps. There is always light. Always. From Broadway to the top of the Empire State Building, there is light. From subway stations to the Statue of Liberty, from the street traffic to the still-open bistros at 3:00 am, there is light. I grew up in that light. In a way, I never strayed far from it. We're taught not to. Do you see?

And where there is no light? You don't go there. Every New Yorker knows it's true. "No light" is an alleyway, is a shadowy corner where a mugger lurks, is a danger zone, is an abandoned warehouse. It's a threat. It's a peril. And childhood perils loom so large, don't they?

It's the deep, dark Atlantic, where the sea monsters live. It's the area behind the dumpsters, or even in your home, in your closet, or in the hallway, when the lightbulb goes out. It's the room you Don't Enter, at least not until you reach for the light switch. It's the space under your bed, where the monsters live. It's the space in your head. They live there, too. In that darkness.

The dark used to be where all the monsters lived. Where they always lived.

My mother once gave me a rose. And she gave me a birthday candle. Both were meant to help me banish my fear. And to some degree, I suppose it worked.

To some degree.

I know I held the rose close, and thought of her. I know I loved the light the candle gave.

I know I still love candlelight. Though it's for a different reason, now.

Vincent...

I learned that there are other things in the dark besides the monsters. I learned there are friends. I learned there is... more.

I can't say the exact moment I stopped being afraid of what lives in the shadows. But I can tell you I no longer am. What a liberating thing, that is.

I gave him my rose. My precious rose. I don't need a talisman against the dark, anymore. He wears it around his neck, in the pouch I sewed with my own hands. My charm against fear, against loneliness, against sorrow. I gave it to him. Of course I did.

Does he hold it, and think of me, the way I thought of my mother? Does it make him wonder, and make him wish? Does he remember that I'm close, even when I'm far away? Does he know I'm thinking of him, too? Does he have fears, fears for us, and does the rose help to calm them? Does he smile, just a little, when he holds it in his amazing, incredible hand?

He does. I know he does. I love him. And I never want him to be afraid. Not for us. Not for anything.

Darkness. There is peace in you. Peace in that stillness. Peace, like the peace underneath the band shell, when the last concert-goer has left. Peace, like the peace after a thunderstorm, after the last notes of "The Unfinished Symphony" have drifted away.

I was wet with rain. In the dark. Water poured down, though a cross-hatched grate. And I laughed, and you held me.

And then the darkness held us both. I remember that night. I remember that darkness, and how good it felt to be concealed by it, as all the people over our heads hurried home.

We didn't hurry. We were already "home." Weren't we?

There's darkness past the bridge, where I meet you in the park. There's darkness in the drainage culvert, the one that means I'm coming to you. There's darkness on the spiral staircase, and darkness even in your chambers, gathered in the corners, where the oldest books are.

My eyes were bandaged, the first time I met you. I was awash in darkness. And you helped me to be not afraid. We began in darkness. We just did.

And then there was Winterfest. Your celebration of light. I remember that, too. Perhaps more than any other single "dark" moment, I remember that one.

I remember that you pushed the Great Hall doors open, open wide, as we all stood in the wind. The wind was guttering the torches, and threading through my hair. Lanterns kept us safe, as we wound down a stair with no railing. And I was not afraid.

You lifted the beam, and pushed the doors wide, and what was in there, in that huge, open room, but darkness? The doors creaked on their hinges, and the darkness seemed to spill out at us; like it would engulf us. Like it would engulf... everything. And you turned to me. And you held out your hand.

"May I lead you through the dark?"

You said it. I can still hear the words. You said it, and you offered me your hand. Your strong, beautiful hand. I remember how you looked. Your hair was as wild as mine, and the torches struggled, as they cast shadows across your face. Your dear, beloved face...

And for a moment, just a moment, I thought the strangest thing. I thought: "Darkness? What darkness? What does he mean?"

There is no darkness, Vincent, when you are with me. No fear I can't face. No shadow that truly frightens me. For how can I be frightened, when I am with you? What can harm me, in your care? What fears could I have, when your hand is close enough to mine to touch?

So I gave you the words, the only words I had for it. And it wasn't "I'm not afraid of the dark" or even "Soon, there will be light." I was holding my candle. I knew it what it was for.

I said, "There is no darkness, Vincent, when you're with me."

There simply isn't. I think there simply can't be. And it wasn't that the darkness became "light." It was that the darkness became... something else. Something welcoming. Something comforting. Something for us to move through, and enjoy.

You move in darkness. And I move in you.

Perhaps that's all we need to know.



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No matter where you are in your own fairy tale, I wish you love. ~

Cindy

