

*The song “Dreams” first charted in August of 1977,
nearly ten years before our show’s debut.*

It was written by Stevie Nicks.

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It remains Fleetwood Mac’s only number one hit.

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Dreams Unwind

by Cindy Rae



For the “Dreams” song challenge, on Treasure Chambers, 2020.



New York, August, 1977

“Now hear you go again, you say, you want your freedom...”

The words were playing on the radio, coming from what seemed like every passing car and taxi. They were also coming from a boom box propped in an open window, drifting to the sultry street, below. Not every version of the song was in the same place, but like most pop songs, all the major radio stations were playing it, and seemed bent on playing it to death. The population at large seemed fine with joining right in, for that.

Vincent didn't much care, other than to acknowledge the song. Like many other things, it was something he couldn't escape.

A heat wave had left almost every window open in the city, and alleyways were great catchers of sound. Music sounds, TV. Sounds, sounds of arguing, and some of just idle chatter, drifted down through the dark. The song played, mixed in with the other noise.

Nighttime had brought almost no relief from the oppressive August heat, and Vincent knew he was sweating inside his cloak.

Much like the unusual chorus, Vincent knew his discomfort didn't matter. The cape was a mobile prison, it was true. But it *was* at least a mobile one.

Not as mobile as Lisa Campbell had proved to be, of course.

In the heavy air around him, the song still continued, a heavy bass guitar riff keeping a lonesome, throbbing beat. It did indeed sound like a heartbeat, driving one mad.

Madness. That would be too easy. If I were mad... perhaps then I could forget...

Vincent side-stepped an overflowing dumpster and kept going, ignoring the overripe smell of garbage that had been left in the hot sun all day. There was a place he wanted... no *needed* to go, tonight. And a woman he needed to see, even if it was only her image, plastered on a wall.

"... It's all right that you can play it the way that you feel it. And listen carefully to the sound... of your loneliness, like a heartbeat that drives you mad..."

It was poetry, but it was hard poetry. Stevie Nicks' sultry, bewitching voice floated over his head as he wound his way through the alleyway. The song seemed to be following him from building to building, probably because most of the radios were tuned to the same Top 40 station, as they played through the open windows.

Which one of us is lonely and going mad, Lisa? he thought. Is it just me? Is it? It must be. Because the world is at your feet. And I'm ... still... just... here.

"...in the stillness of remembering what you had... and what you lost..."

Stevie sounded like she knew what it was to lose a love. Vincent spared a moment to wonder what experience had wrought the song, this song, out of her young frame. On the cover of the *Rumours* album, the one that had been charting the last few weeks, the one propped up in every record store window, he'd seen her, a slight,

blondish woman wearing ballet slippers as she cocked one leg over her male companion.



Ballet slippers...

A different kind of music flooded Vincent's mind, then, and it wasn't Fleetwood Mac. It was a music box concerto, and Lisa Campbell was dancing to it. She was dressed in white tunnel garb, her brown hair scraped back in an uneven ponytail, and she looked as if she were floating, as she turned and spun.



Away from him. Away from... everything.

Thunder rumbled distantly above Vincent's head. Thunder might only happen when it was raining in rock and roll, but in New York, heat lightning was owning the narrow night sky, visible between the buildings. Vincent tugged his hood just a little lower, a reflex against rain that wasn't falling. At least not yet.

Almost there...

"... now here I go again, I see... some crystal visions..."

You sound as haunted as I feel, Vincent thought, sparing a thought for a singer he'd never heard of, prior to a few weeks ago.

A different kind of sound alerted him to possible danger, as a ragged man wobbled into the alleyway, kicking his way past a tin can. Vincent stopped and ducked into the shadows of a doorway, as the staggering drunk sauntered unsteadily toward him, took a pull from a bottle, then leaned against a garbage can for support for a moment.

Vincent knew he hadn't been seen. But the old alcoholic's presence reminded him of the precariousness of his situation, and the foolishness of this venture.

This was not the park, nor was it the off-limits-to-most section of Broome Street. This was a more active area, and even though this particular patch of it was a seldom travelled, the alleyways weren't as safe here as other areas of the city were, for him. To compound that, in some places, brick walls and apartment dumpsters cut off clean access to home. He'd had to climb, to get here. Climb, and in some places, crawl.

He was too far from safety. Too far from the home of the nearest Helper, or safe tunnel access. And he knew it.

The wino belched, aimed himself back toward the main street, and stumbled off. Vincent continued walking, returning to his thoughts. Above him, the music continued:

"... Players only love you when they're playing..."

They do, and she had.

Vincent knew it. Even if no part of him had ever wanted to believe it. He knew he'd loved Lisa Campbell. But he'd been no fool. She'd loved him when she was dancing for him, using him for an audience of one. She'd loved him when she'd been "playing." Playing at being a prima ballerina. Playing at dancing for kings.

Then, but perhaps not only then, she'd loved him.

And, God help him, Vincent knew he'd loved her back. Hopelessly.

As he made his way back down the narrow passageway, the thought and lyric followed him. The building that housed the American Ballet Theater was getting close. And that meant that Lisa was getting close, too. Or at least, that he was drawing closer to Lisa, and the image of her.

A Helper had gossiped to Father that he'd seen the advertisement. That was all it had taken to draw an eavesdropping Vincent up Above.

Still, as he rounded a corner, he was almost surprised to see her face.

Not her *actual* face, of course. Lisa Campbell, prima ballerina for the ABT (among others) wasn't standing near the alleyway adjacent to Columbus and 63rd, anticipating a rendez-vous with her old friend from the tunnels, Vincent. No. Lisa Campbell wasn't doing that.

But she *was* plastered on a wall, (or at least her likeness was) and in that moment, Vincent realized how long it had been since he'd been this close to her.

Lisa Campbell /s Giselle!

The poster screamed, the bold letters almost two feet high. And the young woman he'd once held as a near-goddess stood, halfway up the plaster wall, in a ballerina's enticing pose, as an elfin woman in touch with her inner Welsh Witch provided background music, for the moment:

"It's only me... who wants to wrap... around your dreams, and..."

Vincent stared upward at the woman who had wrapped around his dreams for too many nights, boy and man. Arms drawn back and down, shoulders high, Lisa's young, firm breasts were upthrust, in a crème colored leotard. She was *en pointe*, and her back was an enticing bow. A sheer, jagged hemmed, barely there skirt did nothing to hide the power and beauty of her dancer's legs. Hair in a bun, dark eyes made up to enhance their naturally alluring shape, she was in a three-quarters pose, looking up and away from him, as if she was waiting to run into the arms of an unseen partner.

That hasn't changed, at least, Vincent thought sadly.

"... have you any dreams you'd like to sell?"

It was an amazing lyric, for a pop song. Vincent knew he didn't - but Lisa had. She had, and she'd actually done it, actually sold those dreams. For quite a high price, as it turned out. Ticket prices for the ballet were exorbitant, and featured in red ink, near the bottom of the ad.

And in that moment, it struck Vincent how much, and how easily a dream could be "sold" in New York. Perhaps in New York, more than almost any other place in the world. How *much* they could be sold for... and how little his were worth, really. To anyone but him.

I don't want so much. I swear I don't
"Oh, thunder only happens when it's raining..."

The dates for the performance were printed near the prices, on the bottom of the poster. Tonight wasn't one of them. The ad was for something that was coming, not something that was currently there. The American Ballet Theater normally did a Spring program, then a shorter one, in the Fall. August would inevitably give way to September. And then...

Lisa would be here in a month. A little less than that, actually.

I could go. I could see you. Again. I could. The thought echoed, in his brain, as heavy a thing as the humid air around him.

Vincent stared at the dates. September through mid-October. Limited engagement. Eight shows, no matinees. Evening performances only. Vincent knew she would probably be in front of a sellout crowd. The *Times* had carried news of Lisa's professional ascension.

"And what you had... And what you lost..."

Blue eyes wandered back up to her face, again, and stayed there. *Lisa.* An amazing dancer. His dancer, once. So long ago. Back when adolescence had all but ridden him, and owned him. Back before the wild, unnamed thing inside of him had taken hold, and twisted his heart. Back before Simon had first entered the tunnels, or Olivia had had her first crush. Back before... so much. Too much, sometimes.

So many changes. So many new friends and family Vincent knew he could claim as his own, and old ones, as well...

And yet...

He stared at his lost love's face, wonderingly.

Age had done nothing to dim Lisa's dark beauty. If anything, she was lovelier now than she ever had been. Lisa, like Vincent, was in her twenties, and was coming into the height of her power, both professionally and otherwise. There was confidence in every line of her flatteringly photographed form. Confidence, to go with her grace.

Vincent stepped back, allowing his gaze to travel down her long, backward-bent arms. He recognized their sweet, feminine shape, and remembered nights when he'd tormented himself to sleep, wanting those arms around him.

The lithe arms were frozen in place. Much like every memory he had of her. There were no new memories of her to replace them.

Lisa. I loved you. I loved you so much.

Above his head, from a half-cracked open window, a vinyl LP hissed and popped, as a needle was set down on it. John McVie was strumming his way through the by-now-familiar intro. Again.

"Now here you go, again, you say, you want your free-dom..."

Vincent didn't mind that the song seemed to be following him. After all, there were far more dangerous things that might be doing that. A song was hardly a nemesis. And the bluesy tone of the singer's voice was ... captivating. Comforting, even. She didn't sound quite like anyone else. And somehow, she sounded like she understood.

"Well, who am I to keep you down?"

Who indeed? Vincent stared at the poster some more, knowing he was memorizing it, and that it was about to haunt his nights, some. Lisa Campbell, like Devin, Mitch, and many others before them, (some loved, and some not) had wanted freedom, from the tunnels. And

Vincent knew that he, he of all people, had not been a reason for any of them to stay.

"It's only right that you should play it the way that you feel it. But listen carefully to the sound... Of your loneliness..."

Vincent shook his head and let the feeling of loss wash over him, acknowledging it, rather than trying to fight its power.

Yes. I'm lonely. Sometimes. Are you lonely, Lisa? Are you? Are you as lonely as I am? There's an anthem, over my head, one they're playing... everywhere. One about loss, and heartache, and the trades we make to get there, the price we pay for love. Do you hear it?

When the music stops... do you hear the sound of your loneliness?

But she didn't. He knew she didn't. The perfect, frozen face in the poster didn't feel that. The face in that portrait was never lonely, not now. Perhaps it never had been.

He knew that, as surely as he knew this wasn't the first time he'd seen her since she'd left the tunnels, though that first time, he hadn't been this close to her.

But for that fact, he hadn't been staring at her picture, either, but at the real, living Lisa. As "real" as a ballerina giving a live performance could be, anyway.

She'd danced at the Met, ("for him" she'd said, when they were younger, though he doubted it, now) and he'd sat in their secret place, the one he'd shown her when they were both teenagers.

He'd shown her the ballet, then, and she'd shown him her joy at being there. It was their special place. It always had been.

Three years ago, he'd sat in that same, cramped space, nearly unable to fit, now that he'd grown larger. His broad shoulders had barely been able to squeeze through the narrow passageway he needed to use, to reach it.

She'd been on stage, far away, and that had made her look small. Small, and like a music box dancer. Distant, remote, and... in some strange way... perfect.

She'd looked beautiful. And so far away from him, he knew he'd had only a fool's hope that she'd leave some side door open, that night, so he could come to her, pour his heart out to her, and ask her to forgive him for what had happened between them.

The fool's hope hadn't been realized. The side doors to the Met had remained firmly locked, all of them, and there was no Lisa Campbell, slipping out to see if her good friend Vincent had perhaps come to visit her.

He'd stayed, both beneath the Met, and later, on top of it, until he'd seen her whisked away by a long, black limo. She'd been far from alone. There had been no reason to follow her, even if he'd been able to.

That had been for a performance of "*The Nutcracker*," for the Christmas season.

It was a long way away from Christmas, now.

"... like a heartbeat that drives you mad..."

But he *wasn't* mad, at least not now. And though he knew the raging spirit within him, the dark Other that sometimes emerged, was a kind of madness for him, he knew that madness was not in control, now. No, being here was not madness, even if Father might disagree.

Just a deep, ineffable kind of sadness. One full of nostalgia, and questions about what might have been.

What might have been...

The proud, haughty face in the poster had no answer for that. He wasn't sure if he had one, either.

There were no lines on her paper-smooth face, but Vincent could see the changes, both between now and when they'd been teenagers together, and between now and when she'd danced as Clara. Hair tied back in white ribbons, then, she'd pulled off being the young girl who'd danced with a nutcracker prince, as paper snowflakes had fallen, all around them.

Age was changing her, refining her. Her cheekbones were now more prominent, and her jaw was more aquiline. She'd spent the last few years working hard, and it showed, in her face and form. The young ingénue was all but gone, replaced by this... this exquisite, powerful creature, he now saw before him.

He wondered if she danced amid fake snowflakes, sometimes, still. Then he wondered why he wondered.

Vincent glanced up at the lightning-lanced sky, as the August heat further oppressed him. He felt he could use a few of those snowflakes now, preferably real ones, to cut the summer temperature and humidity. The concrete beneath his feet was radiating the trapped warmth of the sun, as were the plaster wall.

He fanned his cloak, trying to dissipate some of his own body heat, as the air around him seemed to grow denser, and more thick. The heat had weight, and seemed to radiate from everywhere. He was uncomfortable. And only likely to become more so, the longer he stood here.

Go. Go Home. There's nothing for you, here. Nothing at all, he advised himself.

"I loved you," he said aloud, to the unresponsive image. The words were carried away on a barely-there August breeze. And Vincent became aware of something. He'd spoken in the past tense.

Loved. I loved you. Not 'I love you.'

"Players only love you when they're playing. Women... they will come and they will go..."

Perhaps they did, and that was all well and good. But women coming and women going were scarcely a vague comfort to a man who was all but certain that he'd never be in love again, and that if he was, there were reasons to use extreme caution, in that.

The hard lesson of being attracted sexually to Lisa Campbell had borne ugly fruit, for Vincent.

I will be alone. Always. God, that's a bitter thing to bear.

Vincent flexed his sweating hand inside his glove, and felt the strength there, and searched for some of the comfort the gesture sometimes gave him. There was real power in his hands and arms, power to help his family, power to help build and secure his home, much more than there had been just a few years ago, much less than when he'd been a gangly adolescent, worshipping at Lisa Campbell's ballet slipper-clad feet.

Or when I turned, wanting to take Father's head off with one swing, he recalled.

He remembered the love and rage in his young heart, even as he remembered the old man's steady gaze. How full of compassion it had been.

And pity.

Lisa had gasped, and looked shocked, her dress torn, her shoulder, bleeding. What a picture they all must have been. What a hopeless, hapless vision.

"I keep my visions to myself..."

So do I. I have to. Vincent inhaled deeply, hoping the gesture would relax him, as it often did. The muscles in his chest had grown from his teenage years as well, and they'd gone from simply "toned" to "heavy." His shoulders, not as large as they would one day become, had still broadened to unexpected proportions, and his legs never seemed to tire, no matter how fast or far he ran.

All were things he'd discovered about himself, as the years between the last night Lisa Campbell had ever spent in the tunnels, and this one, came down on him, full bore.

The hard-nailed hand flexed inside the glove, again. And again, he felt his strength. He was a male in his prime, and he knew it.

He also knew, with an almost unutterable sadness, that nothing would come of it.

Lisa's left stocking-clad leg stood, toe pointed, the muscles in her calves permanently flexed, permanently enticing.

"...it's only me, who wants to wrap around your dreams and..."

You didn't come back, he accused mentally. You were here, in New York, but you didn't come back. Not to bring down food, or medicine, or even mementos of your triumphs. You never looked back. Not for any of us. Not for Father, or Mary, or Pascal... Or me.

It was a sad thing to know. But there was necessary truth in it, for Vincent.

He studied her further. The “ragged” looking dress was an affectation, only, and Lisa wore it like one. The woman before him looked like she’d never slept on a makeshift cot, or eaten leftovers for three days running, or kept her hands warm thanks to mismatched gloves, in her privileged, elegant, dancer’s life.

The firm, focused look in her brown eyes dared him - and the world - to think otherwise. She had wealth. And, more importantly, for Lisa, she had fame. Fame, and the adoration that came with it. From far more than an audience of one.

You aren’t coming down. Now... or ever. You belong to a different world, now. And it... it belongs to you.

Considering that was exactly what she’d always wanted, he knew he couldn’t feel sorry for her, even though he could still feel some for himself.

Fame. Adulation. You got what you wanted. If only we could all say that.

Closing his eyes, he turned from the frozen image of Lisa Campbell, and let the past go, or at least he released as much of it as he could. He had no idea what the future held for him. But Lisa Campbell was on her own path, now, and it was one that obviously didn’t include him. For whatever reason, it had taken seeing her this close for him to realize it.

“When the rain washes you clean you’ll know...”

It’s all right. It has to be. He knew that if anything, it was probably all but fated.

You were destined to be what you are, to go where you go. Just as I am... destined to stay. The old knowledge hit with a familiar sting. One that didn't hurt quite so much as it could have.

He decided then and there that he wouldn't go see her dance, next month. Or any month after that.

You don't need me there. And I don't need to be there. There are other... players who can love you while you're playing, he thought, borrowing the song's description of something he'd previously had no name for.

The decision surprised him, once it came, and it left him with a certain feeling of peace, if not downright ennui. Loneliness might be a terrible thing, but *choosing* it felt at least somewhat better than having it forced upon him. He glanced back toward the street. Light from a street lamp spilled in through the space between the buildings.

Perhaps there is someone. For me. Out there. But where?

"... like a heartbeat that drives you mad..."

Yes. A heartbeat *was* driving him mad. Or something was, slowly. But he had no idea who that heartbeat belonged to. He wasn't even sure he heard it. He just knew a vague feeling that "someone" might be out there. Sometimes, she felt like she might be close. At others... impossibly distant. Sometimes. Someone. Someone for him. Someone whose name he didn't know, not yet. Someone... special.

On nights like this one, the hope for that felt like the only thing that was keeping him sane.

"...in the stillness of remembering, what you had... and what you lost..."

Yes. That. That was it. That was why he'd come here this evening, the sound of the odd song dogging almost his every step. To confront what he'd had, and what he'd lost.

He'd needed to remember what that, and understand that "I loved you" was a past-tense thing, a bittersweet thing, but a thing that no longer had the power to twist in his heart like a hot knife plunged in.

He'd needed to remember what he'd had and what he'd lost. But not so he could pursue it: so he could let it go. Let it go, so he could, one day, embrace a woman... a woman he knew he'd never met.

He spared the picture of Lisa a parting glance. *I loved you. It just wasn't enough. It never would have been enough -*

"... you know what you've lost..."

He did. He knew what he'd lost, what he didn't have. A love to call his own. And had no idea what he would have, someday. He only knew that someday *had* to come, bearing an almost impossible gift for him. It *had* to. Otherwise, he *would* be lost.

As lost as a song lyric, floating away in a summer night.

No matter where the blame lies, I have to let this go. At least enough... enough to... He could barely finish the thought.

Maybe in a year, maybe in ten, she'll be here. Maybe she will. Maybe. God, I hope she is. She has to be. If she isn't... why even try? Why even be here... wishing?

It was a slim, all but vain hope, and Vincent knew it. But it *was* hope, at least. For now, it was all he had.

The wind picked up, and ruffled the edge of his hood. He could smell water. Water, on the wind. Over his head, the heat lightning became

more substantial, and the low, rumbling sound of thunder began to roll, spreading itself out across the New York skyline.

"...Thunder only happens when it's raining..."

Fat drops began to fall from the sky, as the cloudburst the night had been holding back came down, at first by degrees, and then, in earnest.

Vincent felt it as it pelted his head and shoulders, inside his cape. It was all right. The rain would keep wayward travelers inside, and make his journey back home that much safer. In a way, the rain was helping him, and in more ways than one; the temperature of the air around him dropped fast, as the wind picked up, cooler, now, and more comforting.

"... Yes, thunder only happens when it's raining..." The song began to fade, as the sound of splattering raindrops overtook the stereo.

Vincent stepped away from the wall, and for a moment, pushed his hood back, to catch the sweet benediction of the breeze, and feel the cooling summer rain on his fevered cheeks. It felt good. It felt... necessary, somehow.

"... Say women, they will come and they will go – oh -oh..."

Yes. Perhaps they would. Perhaps they would go. But perhaps... just perhaps... one actually *would* come. Someday.

I'll wait for you. I will wait, he vowed, hitching the hood back up as he began the journey back home. The rain felt like it was washing him clean. Clean of something he'd been carrying for a long, long time. He still knew the regret of what it was to have loved Lisa Campbell. But a part of him also knew hope, for the first time, that he would one day love someone else.

I will wait. And I'll have Dreams. And I'll just have to pray that... that someday, some of them will come true.

The new song that would one day become an old song, then a “new” song again, decades later, dogged his steps, all the way back home, the last lines of it leaving him with its ethereal refrain:

“... And when the rain washes you clean you'll know.

You'll know...

You will know....

Whoa, whoa whoa you'll know...”





"Dreams unwind, love's a state of mind..." –Stevie Nicks

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No matter where you are when your dreams unwind, I wish you love ~

Cindy