

What Ships Are Built for

By Cindy Rae

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*"A ship at harbor is safe. But that is not what a ship is built for..." John
A. Shedd*

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For Halloween, 2021



*Catherine thinks Vincent is taking in the sights of New York with her,
on All Hallow's Eve. Well, not quite...*

*Because it was time to tell the story of the last few scenes of
"Masques" entirely from Vincent's point of view...*

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*There are ribbons in your hair. And ruffles and lace down your arm.
Your dress is so beautiful, I almost can't bear to look.*

But of course, I can't bear to look away, either...

*It's our first Halloween, together. I can only pray for many more. You
appear as one from a different century. Well then, perhaps, so do I.
And we're wandering through New York, together, the "right" people,
but in the "wrong" time.*

*I wonder if that's been the way for us all along. Or perhaps we just
stepped out from the other side of the looking glass.*

*I chuckle at that, inwardly. Imagine me, thinking I just stepped out
from a mirror, a thing I don't even own. And I'm with you. Beautiful
you, and we're both in the wrong century, as we pass along the city
streets...*

What a fantasy I'm having...

*You take me past the Empire State Building, and urge me to see how
high it rises.*

I'm trying.

I'm trying, Catherine.

But... how can I, when it means I'll have to take my eyes off of you?

*The carriage ride through the city streets is both pleasant and
fulfilling. At last, I can go down the middle of a New York street,
unafraid. I'm being pulled along by a horse. And this time, it's a real
one. The thought makes me smile; for how can I do less, than smile?*

I think the horse gave me a knowing look, when I climbed inside, with you. I think it knows my secret, yet swears to keep it – and us- safe. You had to scoot far over on the seat. Your from-another-time dress took up more than half the space.

It didn't matter.

We both settled in. The ruffles at your hem rest atop my boot. I may never forget the sight of that odd, unusual thing...

I wonder if the horse is from a different time, too. Something from 1800's London and used to pulling a hansom cab down cobblestone streets, waiting for some great lady or great politician, to hail it down for a ride. Someone of celebrity, or perhaps, even, nobility.

Or some great author. Someone, like, say, Charles Dickens?

We ride past the library, past the two stone lions that look at me as if they know my secret, and all I can think is, 'Charles Dickens is in there, in that enormous building. "Great Expectations" is in there.' It just is. Our story. Our book. Our very first one, of all the tales we would tell, all the tales would share with each other.

And all the tales we would become with each other...

"No shadow of another parting from you."

And there is none, Catherine. There is no shadow of parting, now. Not now, when all of New York lays before us.

You look like a beautiful lady from a book of long-ago stories, and all I can think... all I can think is...

How beautiful you are. How lucky I am to be with you. How blessed I feel. It's the wrong holiday to feel blessed. But I do.

We rush from one place to the next, because you want me to see it all, or at least as much as I can, before the sun comes up. I know that's what you're trying to do, and I love you all the more for it.

But there is really only one thing I want to see: One beautiful, incandescent thing I want to see, and it's the same thing I always want to see, these days, the same thing I've always wanted to see since the first night I came to your balcony.

No, not that, even before that. Since the first night I found you. Since then. Only one thing, in all this great, wide world.

You. I only want to see you.

We leave the cab. We rush down the streets. The Broadway lights are glaring down on us. On you, and on me. And no one looks twice.

Well, perhaps some of them do. Perhaps some of them give me more than a backward glance. But on this night, I pass as 'one of them.' It is enough. More than.

Your hand is in mine, as we shoulder our way through a throng so thick, their feet teeter on the edge of the sidewalk. It's all right. They won't fall. I don't know how I know. But I do.

And we won't fall.

Because... we already did. We already fell, Catherine. We're still falling. In love with each other. I know it's true. It's all true.

And I smile at that, too. I smile, Catherine, a small, secret smile, and I hold fast to that, as I hold fast to you.

In the full rush of the nighttime crowd, the ebb and flow around us swells like the tide, and I must keep a firm, yet gentle grip upon you, or risk losing you, in this... this ocean of costumed humanity.

Not that I would ever truly lose you. Our bond would prevent that. If I lost you, I would only have to stand still, and sense you. I'd find my way to you. I always would. I always will.

What an... odd thing to know, just now. That in a place I should never be, among people I should never be near, that I will not and cannot lose the one thing I never thought to have: You. Beautiful you, with your hand clasped in mine.

I will never lose you. Even if there are times when we cannot be together, we will never be truly apart. And that is a thought that comforts me, my Catherine: that in this city of millions, that I can never lose you.

And that means... you can never lose me. Doesn't it?

I hope so. I hope that's what it means. For there were times in my life when I was lost, Catherine, truly... simply ... lost.

But this is not one of those times. And "now" is not a time for such reflections.

Reflections... I see myself in the glass of the marquee windows, as we hurry past. You are with me, and I am... whole. Content. Fulfilled.

The street smells like car exhaust. Car exhaust and hot dog vendors and pumpkins, warm-lit from within, as they sit outside shop entrances. The air smells like perfume and crisp leaves, and apples, dripping with caramel. And I'm glad I can smell it. Glad, because I know it's there, and I don't actually have to look at it, at any of it.

I only have to look at you.

You, standing beside me, as we wait for the light to change. You, picking up your skirt with one hand as you hold on to me with the

other. We rush across, and you take dainty steps, in slippers that are becoming too soiled to ever see another Halloween.

It's all right. Everything is.

For the first night in my life, everything is.

You want me to see the fountain in front of the Metropolitan Opera House, and all I can tell you is, 'I'm sure it's lovely.'

But you are more so. So much more so.

The water sprays high, and the errant October breeze is playing with the curl against your scarred cheek, caressing it, lifting the lock of hair for an autumn dance, then settling it back down, again, gently.

I so want to be that breeze.

We rush on, again. The minutes tick past.

They will add themselves into hours. They always do. No matter what they are measured by. By sun, or clock, or candlelight, they always do.

There is a clock in Times Square. In a few months, it will ring out the old year, even as it rings in the new. I will not be here to watch it, for that is a crowd I cannot move among.

But I am here, now.

And I'm still not watching it.

I'm watching you, watching it.

The second hand sweeps up. The moon hangs low. The crowd moves on. New York is amazing...

... for the look it leaves on your lovely face.

We travel on. St Patrick's, next. As you wish, my Catherine.

The faithful see church spires that reach up to an indigo, vaulted heaven, and after that, you take me to a huge statue that promises weary travelers that they have finally found "home." She holds aloft a torch, to light the way.

This is New York. This is New York.

It is the home of great spires and great statues, and people who marvel at both. People who see "heaven" in a cathedral, and "home" in a flaming torch, raised upwards.

It is all wondrous, and yet...

How can I tell them that even though they aren't wrong, they aren't completely right, either? How can I tell them that "heaven" isn't a place, and "home" isn't a destination? That both of those things, "heaven" and "home" are...

A woman?

That both of those things are a woman named "Catherine," to me?

Would they marvel, if I said that? Would you?

I think that as dawn grows closer, your feet must be weary, yet, I know you will not stop, nor even slow, so determined, is my slipper-clad love.

So determined. So strong. There is strength in you. I said that before. Before, the day you left my world for yours.

There is strength in you...

It's still there. I still feel it, my Catherine. And more, I feel it... growing. Strength and love grow together. I never knew that, before. For how could I? How could I, until now? Until just now, when I've realized it, as the sky begins to subtly lighten? How can I know so much of

strength, and courage, and love, until just now, when this night is nearly over?

You pull me east. East, toward the East River. The sun rises in the east.

You're tugging me toward the sun, and not away from it. I wonder if you know how much that means to me, how much I bless you for that one, simple action. How much I bless your courage in thinking that I, too, may have the sun... even if it's only for a few moments.

We didn't waste it. You told me, hours ago, that we shouldn't waste this night, this time, this ... chance.

And we didn't. Or at least, I know I didn't. I know what I saw, Catherine. I know what I saw. You smiled, every time you saw a jack-o-lantern. I didn't ask you why. I hope I remember to.

The crowd is thinning to almost nothing. The hour is either late or early, depending on... I'm not sure what that depends upon. Whether or not you slept at all last night, I suppose.

I know we didn't.

And in truth, I feel like I might never need sleep again; that I will just continue in this waking dream, all my days. This dream, where I can walk freely without fear, this dream, where I can watch you, while no one else looks twice, as the shadow of a great bridge looms near.

My hand is still in yours. My hood is down. My heart is full.

The air around us begins to warm, and I smell salt. I smell the water. And I smell the sun, coming up. The sand in our hourglass (our hourglass?) trickles down. And the dawn-is-coming wind is playing with your hair, again, and this time I must remember: It is not October's wind that does that. It is November's.

I still want to be that wind.

A great barge tracks its way down the river, making its way to the open ocean. May it have an adventure as satisfying as this one has been, for me. The ship has left its safe port, its safe harbor.

“Sometimes, we must leave our safe places...”



Yes. Yes, we must. If only to see the look on our beloved's face, when we do.

You are luminous, as dawn strokes your soft cheek, and brings the light into your eyes ... This. This is the vision I would not have missed for all the world. Both your world... and mine.

We are what ships are built for, Catherine. We are built to go. We are built to leave our safe places. It's not just a thing we can do. It's a thing we're destined to do. I know that, now. What an amazing thing that is to know.

We settle on a bench, sitting down for almost the first time since the carriage ride. And I think I know what it is you're about to say to me, what it is you want to tell me, what the explanation is for this incredible journey all across Manhattan, that you've taken me on.

“You've seen so much of the violence and hatred of in my world. I wanted you to know there's beauty, as well.”

How can I tell you that I saw it all, but at the same time, I only ever truly saw you?

So I give you the only words I have for this night, as I tell you the only thing I really saw, all the sweet night long.

“Oh, I know that. Ever since the night I found you, Catherine.”

Because that was the first night I ever saw you. And now... I see you, still. With your face painted in sunlit shades of peach and ivory... I see you... still.

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

