

# Stolen Moment

by JessicaRae

*You speak of ghosts as a lost thing, wandering away in the night,  
But what if they are simply the clothed dreams of the children  
that come alive once a year - they might!*

The faint knock on the door caught Catherine's attention as she put the finishing touches on her hair. She smoothed her hands across her green Renaissance gown, and opened the bathroom door.

"Just a minute!"

She shouted through the opening, then took one last glance in the large bathroom mirror and hurried through her apartment to the back veranda. Swinging open the glass door, she poked her head around the frame expecting to see Vincent standing there. Her brow furrowed as her eyes met not the tall, gentle giant of the tunnels that she had expected to arrive, but a short Peter Pan with a wide smile and his hat on sideways.

"Kipper?" she asked in clear confusion, glancing around the darkness. "Where is Vincent?"

"Hi, Miss Wendy. Care to fly away with me?"

His attempt at a grown up voice made Catherine laugh.

"Anytime, my dear Peter Pan, how kind of you to offer. Please do step away from the railing, though. I don't want you falling off. My goodness, how did you get up here?"

"I flew!" he replied cheerfully, jumping in place with obvious excitement, his small face scrunched up as he tilted his head to look up at her. "Flew right up here I did!"

Catherine crooked one eyebrow at him and shook her head.

"Peter, that was most dangerous. Flying may be exciting, but most ladies like it better when you use the front door."

"I shall keep that in mind."

A kind, warm voice spoke from behind her and she turned quickly, not having noticed anyone there when she had stepped outside. The happiness she felt at the sound of the previously expected voice, sent a thrill through her heart and she cast him a sly wink, clasping her hands grandly before her.

"I said *most* ladies, my dear Vincent. Not all."

"That's just confusing," Peter Pan wailed behind her in frustration. "*Adults*. Front door, fly up from the sky, what do you ladies *want*?"

Catherine reluctantly dragged her eyes away from her long-awaited companion and tapped Kipper's nose playfully.

"We want *strong* men to rescue us from the baddies in the middle of the dark and the night. Whether they fly or climb the wall, it is just as exciting to us. But I do recommend the shorter ones use the front door for safety. Okay?"

Kipper nodded agreeably. "Yes, ma'am. But Vincent brought me up on his shoulders. We climbed right up the wall!"

Catherine's brows raised again. "Did he now? Well, I think that is even better than flying. I shall have two brave men to escort me to the Halloween party in the tunnels. But, Peter Pan, do run and see if there are any cookies in the kitchen. Peter Pan can't live on pixie dust alone."

"Yes, *ma'am!*" Kipper grinned in delight and disappeared inside the apartment, knocking off his hat in the process.

"Should I be jealous?" Vincent asked softly, stepping forward and retrieving Kipper's lost hat, then settling his large hands on Catherine's slim waist.

She smirked up at him, her eyes twinkling in the porch light above them, and laid her hands on his strong arms.

"I don't know, Vincent, should you be?"

Vincent laughed softly, a rumbling sound buried deep beneath his dark cloak. "Catherine, do not tease me."

"I am not teasing," she replied lightly, enjoying her moment of power. "*This* is not teasing."

A slight growl escaped his throat as he carefully pulled her close and settled his arms around her shoulders.

"Yes, you are, and yes it is."

"You know that you have my heart, Vincent," she spoke softly, and she felt his head lower to rest on hers. "There will never be a question about that."

"I am a man, Catherine. I can not help feeling ..."

"Needy?" She finished his sentence, playfully, and she felt the frustrated rumble in his throat that stirred something within her. The possessive, lion-like rumble. He was jealous.

"Wasn't the word I was looking for," he replied roughly in her ear.

"I know," she laughed. "But it is the one that you are acting like."

"Maybe so," he replied, pulling away slightly to look down at her. The light glinted in his eyes, and she saw the war within him. "If that is how I am acting, then what do you think would happen if I wasn't merely acting?"

A becoming blush crept across her face, and she raised her eyebrows in consternation. "*Vincent*, not *now!*"

"I found the cookies!" A crumb-faced Peter Pan vaulted onto the patio, breaking the stillness of their moment with a rush of noise. "I feel ready to fly all the way to the moon! Say, Vincent, my hat!"

Still caught in the throes of their moment, Vincent allowed the child to take the hat from his hand without a word. His gaze was still focused on his companion, and she finally tore her eyes from his. The night air was burning her cheeks, and she didn't dare speak to him again. She was afraid that, if she did, poor Kipper would be getting left out in the cold on the veranda by himself.

Catherine took a deep breath and leaned down on the small boy's level, patting his head.

"Good, let's go then. Get the hat on, then."

She tried to be casual but to her mild embarrassment, her voice was tense and raspy, and she found her hands were shaking - but not from the cold night air. Confounded hormones.

"Now, through the door, Kipper. Peter Pan won't be flying back down the wall."

"Aw man," the boy frowned in disappointment. "Why *not*?"

Catherine pushed him toward the entrance firmly. "Because I need you to walk down with me so no one grabs me in the hallway. Big strong Peter Pan like you is just what a Renaissance girl like me needs. What if Captain Hook is in the hallway somewhere!"

The little Peter Pan's eyes widened in imaginative understanding. He pulled his cardboard sword from his belt and flourished it proudly.

"I shall protect you!" He disappeared into the apartment again, waving his weapon as if there were Captain Hooks around every corner.

She moved to step through the door herself, but Vincent was right behind her, his strong arms pulling her close again. For a moment, there was silence. She felt her knees beginning to slightly weaken, and knew she had to say something before poor Kipper asked why they were still outside.

"Vincent, we need to go. Kipper...."

He chuckled, the rumbling vibrating against the tender skin of the back of her neck. For a moment, she didn't know if the child would be an urgent enough deterrent. Perhaps they could just send him on an errand for an hour.....

Finally, Vincent whispered in her ear. "There will be another time, fair maiden."

A feeling akin to disappointment washed over her, then was replaced by the warmth that she found glowing in his eyes, as he gently turned her around so he could see her face in the glow of the light. Standing on her toes, she touched her cheek to his and smiled.

"I count on it."

END