

Tale of the Winterfest Candle

by Jessica Rae

(Dedicated to Skippy)

"Why do you give candles?" the stranger asked, holding a tall and amber creation of wax in careful hands. The wax was cold and hard in the winter air, a stark contrast to the gently falling snow. It had been given to them by Vincent, the cloaked guardian of the World Below. It was carefully crafted, and beautiful even in the dim, snowy light.

"We do not give just candles." Vincent replied, his smile hidden as he wrapped his cloak closer against the chill of the night.

"Then what do you call this?" The stranger hefted the object, careful not to let it fall, and eyed the lion man with a careful gaze.

"It is light," Vincent nodded, the glow of the streetlight glinting on his cat-like teeth as he spoke gently. "It is opportunity, it is joy, it is peace. We do not give candles, we give the opportunity to have light."

"I am welcome, then?" The stranger questioned, an almost wistful lilt to their voice. "The candle will allow me access to your world? This Winterfest – I am to come, right?"

"No," Vincent replied, his tone full of amusement as the eager eyes before him searched his face. "Not simply that. The candle does not allow you access to our Winterfest. Your light does."

The stranger stood for a moment in confusion at the allegorical statement, and Vincent took pity on them.

"Come with me."

The snow crunched under their feet as they carefully made their way around dumpsters and piles of wood and stones, alongside the brick buildings, to arrive at the place where the alley was the darkest and coldest.

"Hold out the candle." Vincent instructed knowingly.

The stranger could only tell where he was by his voice in the dark, and offered the cold, firm object to the speaking shadows.

"Has it made a difference, any difference at all?" Vincent spoke again, the question fading in his voice as he turned away.

"N-No." The stranger's brow furrowed and they listened carefully for the crunch of snow that would indicate that Vincent had simply gone into the night, leaving them in the darkness thick with snow. But it did not come.

A scratch, and whoosh met the ears of the stranger, as the strike of a match brought an instant glow to the dark alley corner. The lion man's face shone in its light, his eyes glittering as the flame danced in them. His paw-like hand reached out the fluttering match, and held it to the still and patient wick. The wick took the fire gladly, and the flame grew into the air, a dancing pixie in the night.

"Do not bring your candle, bring your light." Vincent spoke patiently, his voice gentle on the cold breeze. "Be willing to give everything you are made of, to bring something better to someone else. Our Winterfest would be cold and lonely with simply candles to mark it's arrival. But the light – only our friends and family can bring that to our great table."

Then the stranger understood.

One does not simply keep the tools and gifts that they have been given as keepsakes, or gain, or status in this world.

But burn it, use it, give it all away, and somehow – someday – you might just bring about a better world.

