

Remembrance

by Joyce Clarke

(from Masquerades '93)

PART ONE

Of all the many annual events celebrated in the tunnel world, below the streets of New York, there was one anniversary that Vincent and Catherine kept for themselves alone.

It might appear strange that Catherine should want to celebrate, or even remember the night she was attacked, raped, had her face slashed and was left to die; but for Catherine, it was the night Vincent came into her life.

For Vincent, it was the night he found his Catherine and he knew even then, that she would change his life, forever.

The love they shared was unique... something there had never been... a dream that had become a reality... against all the odds, against all that life and fate had thrown at them... against all their sufferings, pain, loss, anguish and fears... they had endured and over the years, that love and the very special bond that they shared, had - if anything - grown stronger.

Their chamber was brightly lit, with dozens of flickering candles, a sparkling, dancing light and, as Catherine put a taper to the last two, she felt his silent presence behind her and his eyes upon her. She blew the taper out and turned to face him. Their eyes met and held.

Even now, the sight of him never failed to take her breath away and the passage of time had done little to dim his unique beauty. There were a few extra lines around his eyes, which were the same piercing blue and his golden hair showed a mixture of grey, but he was still tall and magnificent as ever he was - and he was all hers.

As she walked into his arms, Vincent still marvelled that Catherine could love him - every part of him - and all that he was. Sometimes, like right now, he was so overwhelmed with love for her, he was unable to speak.

Although Catherine had almost reached her fiftieth year, she was fortunate to have the type of skin and shape of face that held its youth longer than most. She still wore her hair long and at the moment - it was fastened back. It too, was flecked with grey and she had made no attempt to cover it. She stood there, basking in the warmth of his embrace - Vincent's still beautiful Catherine.

He held her face in his hands and kissed the end of her nose.

"Do you realise, Mrs Wells, we have been together for eighteen years?"

Catherine kissed his chin. She had a feeling that if she kissed anything else, things would get out of hand and the night was yet young.

"Yes, Mr Wells, I do," and she playfully dug her teeth into the part of his chin that she had just kissed. "And I also think, Mr Wells, that like good wine, we seem to improve with age," and she grinned wickedly up at him.

"I'll agree with that," his laughing blue eyes gazed down at her. He suddenly let her go, more because if he did not, he would not be able to and, spinning her around he playfully slapped her bottom and cried, "Woman - food, I'm starving!"

Later, when Catherine came through with the tea, Vincent was standing in front of the fireplace, staring intently at a silver framed photograph of their son, Jacob, a laughing golden-haired little boy, just before his first birthday.

Catherine put the cups down on the table and went to join Vincent, ducking under his arm, wrapping herself around him and resting her head on his shoulder. They stood together, content, but with the hint of sadness and loss, that though time had eased it and made it bearable, would always remain part of them.

They were remembering...

Back to the darkest time of their lives, that nevertheless, proved to be the final chapter and an end to all the great tests of endurance that their unique love had been put to.

PART TWO

The August heat of New York was overpoweringly oppressive and the brilliant sunshine and blue skies of the past weeks had given way to heavy grey clouds, which held the heat in, giving the city a sinister and claustrophobic feel about it, as everyone waited for the imminent storm to break.

The heat had even permeated the tunnel world Below, as there was no cool breeze to waft through their natural ventilation system - and they too, waited.

It was after midnight when Vincent went Above, to the Park entrance and he was glad that the impending storm had not yet broken, as he wanted to be out there to see it; be part of it. Nature's powerful forces at work held a great fascination for him.

Vincent moved silently to a sheltered spot on some high ground and settled down, waiting...

Catherine lay in a semi-comatose state, in a very pleasant room overlooking the Park, but some distance from her old apartment. It was not unlike her own bedroom, with French windows opening out onto a small balcony. The windows were wide open, but the net drapes barely moved in the stillness.

Catherine had been spirited away to this 'safe' location after her 'death' and for more than a month, she had been on a life support system in a very critical condition.

For the past five months she had held her own, in as much as she was out of danger and was not going to die - but Catherine was unable to do anything for herself and had not uttered a sound in all that time. She seemed to have given up her will to live and had closed herself off from the rest of the world.

The doctor in charge said she had suffered a complete breakdown, due to the horrific trauma she had been subjected to, at Gabriel's instructions.

Catherine lived safely within herself - within her dreams - dreams of Vincent and the love they shared together - but she could not tell anyone; must not tell anyone, and so Catherine existed in this enclosed world, safe within herself and with Vincent.

This night, Catherine was dreaming; dreaming the same dream she had dreamt two years before - walking through the park, hand in hand with Vincent, neither believing it was real.

They picnicked on the grass...

The air was heavy, expectant, waiting...

Vincent's heart was beating fast and thick, he could hear its throb. Suddenly, it stilled to an inexpressible feeling that thrilled it through... something strange and sharp, not unlike an electric shock, acting on his senses, honing them to a sharp sensitivity, they rose expectant, eye and ear, waiting...

In her dream, like before, Catherine and Vincent drew together, lips almost touching, when, without warning, a deafening roll of thunder seemed to rattle the whole building, followed by a flash of forked lightning that ripped the heavens apart... and Catherine screamed.

"Vincent! Vincent!"

Vincent heard her! His beloved Catherine! And their connection was forged as if it had never been broken.

"Catherine! I'm here! I'm coming for you!" His voice cried out, drowned in a clap of thunder, but her call ignited his whole body as he homed in on her and made for the most direct route through the tunnels.

The whole area had been plunged into darkness, as the overhead power cables had been hit by lightning and brought down.

The nurse entered Catherine's room with a flashlight in her hand, to see that she was all right. She could have sworn she heard Catherine call out, but maybe she could have been mistaken, as Catherine looked exactly the same as she had for the past five months.

The nurse sighed and went over and dosed the French windows...

Catherine lay there in the darkness, waiting...

Catherine was on the top floor of the twenty-two storey building and Vincent came over the roof, dropping silently down onto the small balcony. He listened for any sound of movement from her room, then satisfied, he opened the French windows and entered. He went to the outer door, listened, but all was silent and the whole place was still in total darkness.

Vincent did not need any lighting to see Catherine, his night vision was excellent. He gazed at her, confirmation of the certain knowledge held deep within him, over the past long months that his love was still alive, somewhere.

He touched her face and his fingers moved down to her neck, to feel for the pulse, which was beating strongly - and Vincent let out the breath he was not aware he was holding.

"Oh, Catherine, my love," and he lent over her, and gently kissed her lips. A small sound escaped from deep within her and Vincent smiled.

Outside, the thunder rolled and lightning crashed, lighting up the room as if it was broad daylight. Vincent hoped the rain would hold off a few more minutes.

He reached for the blanket that lay across the end of the bed and shook it out. Then lifting her up, he laid her gently on top of it, and wrapped it firmly around her. Vincent knew he needed one hand free, until he was clear of the building, so for the moment, he lifted her over his shoulder, fireman style and went out into the storm.

He was taking his love, home.

PART THREE

The sentried outposts of the tunnel world were used to seeing Vincent prowling through the tunnels at night and no one stopped him as he swept past, with his precious bundle in his arms.

Vincent was a man who needed little sleep... afraid to sleep... because of the nightmares that stalked his dreams, leaving him feeling haunted and afraid for hours afterwards.

Even now, with his son... Catherine's son... their son... safely home where he belonged, Vincent was still a creature of the night, knowing that their precious miracle was sleeping safely in the nursery.

He gazed adoringly down at his love, cocooned in his arms and with a singing heart and no hesitation, he made for his own chamber.

The pipes came alive with tapping messages and as he settled Catherine in his bed, he heard footsteps and turned to find Mouse standing there, mouth open. Vincent's face lit up.

"Yes, Mouse, it is Catherine; go and wake Father and Mary, will you please?"

"Okay good, okay fine," he answered, grinning, nodding his head up and down.

The electricity supply had been switched over to the emergency generator and the nurse could not rid herself of this niggling thought that she had heard Cathy call out - although she did not hear exactly what she had said, because of the thunder - but, it sounded like someone's name.

She stared at the bed, horrified - Cathy had gone and the nurse knew full well that Cathy was incapable of doing anything, going anywhere, without a great deal of help. Nevertheless, she checked the bathroom and the balcony, getting herself drenched in the torrential downpour that was now falling.

In the control room on the lower floor, the security screens had been blacked out, due to the storm damage and it took a few minutes for the screens to clear, after the generator had been turned on. It was then that the men noticed that Catherine was not in her room.

"Damn!" he exclaimed, "Where's the stupid bitch got to?" He rewound the video tape to the point before the power cut and she was still on her bed, like she had been for the past five months - then when the power had been restored, she had gone. "Hell, heads are going to roll for this!" and he picked up the phone, trembling with panic.

Father could feel Vincent's excitement as he entered the chamber with Mary. He could not believe Mouse, when he had woken him up, with the news that Catherine was home.

Father looked at her, lying there, just a shadow, a shell of her former self - what had they done to her - those monsters?

He could feel Vincent, almost exploding with nervous excitement, so he got straight on with the job of giving her a thorough examination. It almost broke his heart to see her so wasted and her once indomitable spirit, was nonexistent.

He left Mary to take care of the more personal tasks and led Vincent out into the tunnel, taking his arm in an affectionate gesture.

"Vincent, basically, Catherine is quite sound, at least there is no risk that she might die - but - there is no telling how long she will remain in this condition. Has she spoken at all?"

"Not exactly, but she knows I'm here - she will recover, Father. I know that, without a shadow of doubt."

"But how can you be so sure?"

"Because our bond was restored tonight. She called out my name and I heard her. I don't know how to explain it, but tonight, out there, the adverse weather conditions created a strange phenomenon - just nature doing her best to bring us together - and I felt all her fear and her aloneness.

"Whatever horrors she has suffered, she went to the only safe place there was for her to go - within herself, knowing I was there for her.

"Father, that is why I have always been conscious of her and have never been able to completely accept that she was dead."

Father was nodding his head.

"Yes, Vincent, I can go along with that." He reached out and took Vincent's face in his hands. "You know what we have to do now; convince Catherine that she really is home and safe, so I prescribe plenty of visitors and tunnel gossip. Include her in everything, even if it seems she is not with us. Carry her to your favourite haunts - and have Jacob with you as much as possible. Talk to her, read to her, be with her."

Vincent was smiling at him, feeling his excitement and nodding in agreement. "And I love you too, Father."

To Catherine, the sounds of tapping on the pipes, the familiar voices, even the smells, all seemed real, so real, but for so long now, she had lived in her own private world. She had retreated so far within herself, to the one place she knew she was safe - with Vincent, in his world Below. Everyone she knew was in this private, safe world - Father, Mouse, Jamie, Mary and, of course, her Vincent, who never left her.

Even though now it seemed so real, she refused to acknowledge it - she dare not. She would not be tricked again - not again. She could not go through all their torture again - not again - and she retreated even further into her safe, secret world.

Vincent could feel her distress, her mistrust and her fear and he held her in his arms, soothing her with his words.

"Catherine, my love, you are safe, you are home, you are with me," but he was unable to reach her.

He encouraged their son, Jacob, to play on the bed and climb all over her. Jacob seemed to know who it was and splodged wet sloppy kisses on her face - but nothing would break through the barriers that Catherine had erected, to protect her from all her very real terrors and the torture she had been put through.

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On the second afternoon, Vincent tried something, which for him was not easy - but this was Catherine and he had to try and break through to her shuttered mind. He propped her upright, with plenty of cushions and she sat there, eyes closed, face blank against the world.

He sat on the bed facing her, then, taking both her hands, he intertwined them with his own, so that she would be conscious of the fur covered backs and the claws. At no time did she attempt to pull away.

He leaned forward slightly and placed her hands, spread flat, upon his face. Holding his breath, he let her go.

For a moment or two, she did not move, then her small hands began their exploration of his face - his eyebrows and high cheek bones, his fur covered nose and his strange feline hare-lip; the soft velvet feel of his chin. His lips parted involuntarily under the exquisite torture and her fingers probed into his mouth, touching his teeth and long fangs. He captured her fingers gently in his teeth, wetting them with his tongue and he heard her whimper. He released her fingers and took her face in his hands. Her fingers never left his face, staying close to his full bottom lip.

"Catherine, open your eyes, I am here, you are safe - no one will hurt you anymore."

She whimpered again and her hands left his face and went slowly around his neck, holding onto handfuls of his hair.

Their heads met and then their noses touched, then nuzzling each other with their mouths, Catherine began to make strange meowing sounds, as the reality finally gripped her.

Still holding onto his hair, she explored his face with her mouth, making all kinds of small murmuring sounds.

There was no passion, but Vincent could feel her joy of discovery, as tears spilled down his face and his love kissed them away.

At last, she dared to open her eyes and fill her vision with all she had ached to see most, in all the world.

Her Vincent.

Everyone was thrilled to see Catherine was now conscious of where she was, and no one more so than Father. Catherine's long exile from the real world had taken its toll of her and Father did not have any need to explain to Vincent, that this was only the start of a very long road to recovery.

Her condition was not good and due to all the stress she had endured, she had lost her power of speech. Her limbs were wasted from lack of exercise and once she regained some of her strength, would have to learn to walk again.

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Catherine had been home for five days. She had regained her speech and there was a noticeable improvement in her, every day.

Vincent had hardly slept at all since he had brought her home, but sat in his chair at the side of her bed and watched her sleep. Apart from that first night, Jacob too, had slept contentedly in his cot at the foot of the bed, where his father could see him and be close to his mother.

Whilst Mary was settling Catherine for the night, Vincent went and put on his night shirt and warm robe. Mary had suggested that just to get out of his clothes would relax him - he agreed, he did feel better, more comfortable. He had a spare quilt to put round his legs and as he went to pick up a book he was reading he heard a sound behind him. It was barely a whisper.

"Vincent."

Catherine had moved across the bed to make room for him. She had pulled the covers back and reached out her hand.

"Please," she whispered.

He checked on Jacob, who was sleeping contentedly, then climbed into bed beside his love. They entwined themselves around each other and slept the sleep they had only ever dreamed of - safe in each other's arms.

For the next two weeks of days and nights, it was enough for them, just to be together and, during that time, Catherine's memory had become almost fully restored.

In the middle of the night, Vincent awoke with Catherine close in his arms, his need of her impossible to disguise. In the embarrassment he felt, he quickly moved to get out of bed, to go to the bathroom, but Catherine clung to him.

"No... Vincent, it's all right, don't go... I want you too," her voice whispered. "Please..."

"I might hurt you."

"No... you would never hurt me, Vincent... we both know you would never hurt me."

He looked down at his hands; treacherous weapons and Catherine, sensing his fear, pulled her nightdress up over her head and flung it to the bottom of the bed. She knelt up in front of him and reaching for his left hand, she placed it over her breast.

"Touch me, Vincent. I want to feel your beautiful hands on my body."

He blinked in surprise as she continued.

"Vincent, I have waited, suspended in time... but some small part of me... hung on... knew that you would find me... that we would find each other." She saw the wondrous look on his face and realised something else.

"You can't remember, can you, Vincent... when Jacob was conceived, in the cave below the catacombs?"

"No... nothing." He withdrew his hand. "Catherine, I have tried desperately to remember, all of it. I even went back there, to see if that would stir my memory... but I only did battle with my beast within... and then I found your crystal, in the sand, on the floor. Catherine, up to that point, I had not given our child any conscious thought... I was in so much pain."

His lip trembled, tears welled up, spilling down his face.

"Finding your crystal, reminded me that I had a son... we, had a son... and he was out there, somewhere... and that I would find him."

Catherine drew him into her arms, feeling his hands gently clasping her naked body... touching her... and her hands were busy, pulling up his nightshirt, desperate to be close to him... to be part of him... and Vincent came to her, willingly.

Catherine made a miraculous recovery, due, not to anything Father or Peter could prescribe, but to the simple joy of being home, safe, loving Vincent and their son; and it was not long before she was seen jogging through the tunnels.

PART FOUR

It was many weeks before they shed their feelings of unreality - sometimes afraid of sleeping because of their nightmares - afraid of waking and finding themselves alone.

During these first early weeks, the fear of being alone - apart - haunted them and together, with their son, they were scarcely ever apart, even for a moment.

They told each other in great detail, of their separate terrible experiences, not out of morbid curiosity, but an overwhelming need to share each other's suffering, to ease each other's pain and fears - and their physical love was the balm to heal their wounds.

They both knew that some of the mental scarring would always remain, but having shared their ordeals; shared all of it, it made them stronger, brought them closer, though it seemed impossible that they could be any closer; more a part of each other - either physically or through their bond - but they were.

This period of adjustment, convalescing and just being together, loving each other, was something they both needed, plus the wonder of getting to know their son, who was a pure joy to them.

Without a doubt, to Vincent and Catherine, Jacob was the most loved little boy in all the world.

This was a sentiment also shared by Father, who seemed to have been injected with a new lease of life, now that he had his whole family around him, safe. His eyes sparkled, his face relaxed into a permanent smile and even his hip did not seem to trouble him as much - and the pleasure that radiated out of him, when he held his grandson, was a joy to behold.

And of course, Vincent and Catherine were more than happy to indulge him. Naturally, Father had now been promoted to Grand-Father - a title quickly adopted by the whole community and a name Father could not have been more proud of, had he been knighted.

Catherine was well aware, that to even try to return to her old life would be suicidal. The risks were so great, they did not bear thinking about. An organization headed by a man like Gabriel, did not just give up and go home, just because Gabriel was dead - she knew that someone would take his place and would be watching, waiting and, she also knew these people had infiltrated high ranking posts - like John Moreno, in the DA's office.

No one could be trusted.

Without a doubt, someone would still have videoed evidence of Vincent's existence and of her own incarceration with them, including the birth of their son.

Catherine did not kid herself that they would let go of something so unique - so priceless - in their twisted, evil scheme of things. She knew that these people were fanatics, to whom the sanctity of human life meant nothing.

She shuddered at these thoughts because their son could be destined to face the same dangers.

Because of her ordeal, she held a deeper understanding of what Father must have suffered all those years ago, when the world he loved, turned against him, became his enemy and he ended up losing everything.

It was only Catherine's foresight that ensured she did not lose her own inheritance after her 'death'. She had used her skills as an attorney and made her money safe, after her father had died. Even then, she knew that if anything happened to her, she wanted her wealth to go to Vincent, Father and their world Below and to help the Helpers, Above. With Peter as executor and advisor, she set up a charitable trust fund called 'Helper's Network'.

When she discovered she was pregnant, some premonition prompted her to add a codicil to her will, to include the sale of her apartment in the Trust Fund.

It was more than three months before Vincent and Catherine gave any serious thought to their future. Vincent was not at all happy that Catherine should have to live totally Below. To Vincent, she would always be a woman of both worlds and it was what he wanted more than anything for their son.

However, he did accept that for the moment and, the immediate future, the risks were far too great - for all of them and the safety of their world.

Catherine had adapted well to life Below, far better than even Vincent imagined she would and he told her often, how proud of her he was.

Her answer to that, was, "Vincent, we are alive, we are well and we are together - and there is nowhere in the whole world, I would rather be."

Both Vincent and Catherine were aware of Catherine's only sadness - that Joe and Jenny and a few other close friends, still believed her to be dead, and that Elliot had been killed protecting Vincent.

They also wondered why Diana had not been in touch, since Catherine's return.

Catherine, with her woman's intuition, had a very good idea why Diana had not been in touch.

Vincent had told her in great detail of Diana's tireless and unstinting efforts to find their son; killing Gabriel in the process. Plus all the other dangers she had faced, protecting Vincent and their world.

Catherine smiled.

Vincent had really no idea of his sexual magnetism - no idea that other women besides Catherine, could love him and long to be loved by him. Love him enough to protect him and keep him safe - whatever the cost.

Catherine hoped that someday she would be able to meet her - and thank her.

PART FIVE

For months now, ever since Vincent had first been captured, the sentry duty on the outposts had been doubled - usually an adult and a young person over the age of twelve. It meant that a high percentage of their people were tied up with guard duty, but everyone rested easier and no one underestimated the dangers.

One evening, just after dinner, the pipes busy with the continuous metallic hum of messages; Vincent and Catherine were in Father's chamber. Catherine was just about to take Jacob and get him ready for bed, when Kipper came flying through the entrance, leaping down the short flight of steps and skidding to a halt in front of Vincent.

"Vincent! Vincent! Mouse and Jamie are holding a man in the tunnels! He was coming from the direction of the docks!" The words rushed out in an excited jumble.

Vincent had hold of Kipper's shoulders in an effort to calm him down.

"All right, Kipper, slow down. What kind of man is he? Is he alone?"

"Yes, he's alone - Jamie went back away to make sure - but Vincent, he keeps asking for you!"

"Me!"

Vincent glanced at Catherine, who had come to his side. Catherine took hold of Kipper's arm and bent down to be at his level.

"Kipper, what was this man like?"

Kipper, whose breathing was easing somewhat, said, "He seems to be in a bad way, as if he's lived rough - couldn't see what he looked like; too much hair and the hood of his duffle coat hid his face. Oh, and he had trouble walking."

Vincent picked up his cloak and Catherine grabbed her jacket.

"Father, will you look after Jacob for me? I'd like to go with Vincent."

"Yes, of course, don't worry about us, just go with care."

Vincent could see there was no point arguing, so taking her hand, said, "Come, Catherine."

They followed Kipper through the tunnels, Catherine keeping a tight hold of Vincent's hand. As they neared the section of the tunnels where Kipper said the intruder was being held, Vincent put his hood up and asked Catherine to stay behind him, just in case she was recognised.

Jamie came to meet them.

"Vincent, the man is in a very bad way, I don't know how he made it this far - he uses a stick to walk with. He won't tell us who he is; just keeps asking for you."

"All right, Jamie, thank you. Stay with Catherine and I will go and find out who it can be."

Keeping his face hidden, Vincent approached. Mouse was leaning against the opposite wall and the two friends acknowledged each other, without words.

The man was sitting on the floor and slumped forward in such a way, Vincent wondered if he was in fact, still alive. His face was hidden by the hood of his filthy duffle coat and Vincent stood, a few feet away from him.

"I am Vincent; you were asking for me?"

There was a slight movement and the man lifted his head towards Vincent's voice, as if the effort took all his strength.

"Vincent - you're alive! Thank God, you're alive!" The voice held so much pain and despair, as well as relief.

Vincent went closer, hardly daring to believe.

"Elliot?" he asked, incredulously.

"Yes," Elliot whispered, and began to cry.

Vincent went down on his knees and enveloped him in his arms - he felt as if he was holding a bag of bones.

"It's all right, Elliot, you're safe now. We will soon have you well again." His voice was soothing, as if comforting a child.

Catherine came forward, disbelieving what she had heard. She came round and knelt on the floor opposite Vincent, her face uncertain, her eyes questioning.

"Is it Elliot?"

Vincent nodded and her eyes filled with tears. Vincent gently pulled away from him.

"We're all safe, Elliot, thanks to you - and I found our son - and Catherine is safe here, too."

"Cathy?" and he turned to her, his blue eyes full of wonder and tears.

Catherine could not help but be shocked by his appearance. He was no longer the handsome Elliot Burch of old. The right side of his face was terribly scarred from the explosion; he was pitifully thin and gaunt; his hair and beard were dirty, long and matted and, probably lousy too, but she showed no sign of distaste, and hugged him to her.

He cried his heart out.

Vincent rose to his feet and turned to Kipper.

"Would you go back for a stretcher and blankets - get someone to help you. Jamie, go and warn Father and ask William if there is enough hot water for a bath - and see if Mary can have Jacob in the nursery tonight."

No explanations were asked of Elliot that night; the main job was getting him clean and de-loused. He devoured two large helpings of William's thick soup and a mug of cocoa made with milk. Then, he was settled gratefully into a warm clean bed, where he slept for the next eighteen hours.

Elliot opened his eyes, listening to the metallic tapping sounds. There was a woman sitting close by, knitting. Hearing him stir, she looked up.

"Good evening, Elliot. I'm Mary; how are you feeling?"

He thought about that for a moment and his eyes looked haunted as he told her, "I'd forgotten what it was like to wake up in a clean bed. Feel so ashamed ... the state I was in."

She reached out and took hold of his hand.

"Listen, Elliot... most of us who come here have travelled at least some part of the road you have travelled; suffered starvation, depravation, loss of dignity. Father almost froze to death before he was brought here. He lost everything. You are amongst friends, Elliot, friends who understand. We are all just so relieved you are alive."

"Thank you, Mary," and tears threatened to spill down his face yet again.

Over the next few days, Elliot gradually gained some strength and piece by piece, he told Vincent, Catherine and Father, what had happened to him, over the past months.

By some miracle, he had crawled out of the water and lapsed into unconsciousness. He had a bullet in his back that had been meant for Vincent and his hands and face were badly burned from the explosion.

During the night, a vagrant fell over him in the dark and emptied his pockets, taking his wallet, watch, ring and a gold chain. Then, just for good measure, kicked him in the back of the head.

In the morning, a docker had found him, barely alive and had him taken to a charity hospital, where they removed the bullet and tended to his burns.

When Elliot regained consciousness, he could not remember who he was, or anything about his past life. All his identification had been stolen and even his finger prints, which might have been helpful had been mostly burnt away.

When he was more mobile, and completely out of danger, he was transferred to a charity run rehabilitation centre, until his burns had healed and he was on his feet. He was then found an adequate one room apartment and managed to exist by doing casual work.

Two months ago, he collapsed with pneumonia and an elderly lady, from the next door apartment took care of him. Before he had properly recovered, his money ran out and he got behind with his rent, so he quietly left in the middle of the night and took his chances on the streets.

During the time he was ill, he kept getting flashes of memory, but the strongest remembrance, was not of all his wealth and power, but of Vincent and how he had almost betrayed him - and his quest to find his missing son.

For the past month, Elliot had lived rough and the weather had been wet and cold. Too weak to work, he had been reduced to begging and scavenging in trash cans - but more of his memory returned every day, which was soul destroying for him, because he could see no way back to what he had once been.

Then he remembered the night he and Cathy were almost killed on the docks and how they escaped to the tunnels. Elliot's one thought was, that as he had survived, so Vincent could have survived as well. He knew that if he could find Vincent, he would get the help he so desperately needed.

In Elliot's weakened condition, he was exhausted by the time he had walked the docks and found the right grate cover. It almost finished him off pulling it clear, then sliding it back, once he was in. He was also aware, that if he collapsed in the tunnels and no one found him, he would die down there.

He was found; Vincent had lived and Catherine and, their son. Elliot discovered a place, a world he never knew existed, safe, below the streets of New York.

PART SIX

Joe Maxwell unlocked his front door and slammed it to behind him, with his foot. He dropped his briefcase and overcoat on a chair, then collapsed, exhausted onto his couch. His shoes clattered noisily to the floor and that, was the last thing he heard.

Since he had been promoted, his work load had doubled, mainly due to his own personal need to check all the previous work that Moreno had done and then, for the past two weeks, he had half his staff off sick with a particularly virulent type of influenza. Joe kept hoping he could stay clear of it, as he did not have time to be ill. He had been relying on some help from Diana Bennett, but had not been able to contact her in more than a week.

The phone ringing, dragged Joe back to consciousness and he reached out sleepily into space, thinking he was in his bedroom, then, realising where he was, turned over, stretched over the back of the couch and grabbed the still ringing telephone.

"Yeh," he mumbled grumpily into the mouthpiece, rubbing his eyes in an effort to wake himself up.

"Joe Maxwell?" a man's voice asked.

"Yeh, that's me," Joe replied, and the man's voice continued.

"It would be advisable for you to go and check on Diana Bennett, at her apartment, before you go in to your office."

The phone clicked and hummed with the dialling tone.

Joe's head was still fuzzy with sleep and he stared at the handset before reaching over and putting it back in its cradle. Looking at his watch, he saw that it was just gone seven o'clock.

He sat there, still feeling drugged with sleep and the realisation that he had spent the whole night on his couch. Hauling himself to his feet, he found his shoes and headed for the bathroom to stick his head under the cold water tap. There would be no time for a shower this morning.

As he started his car, he had this feeling of impending doom and using his car phone, he rang the police department for some back up.

Joe pulled up in front of her apartment building, the police car rolling up quietly behind him - he had requested no sirens. The security door had been wedged open and they went straight to the freight elevator, which was down. They stepped out into her attic apartment and Joe drew his revolver, as he made his way to her bedroom.

She was sprawled on her bed, fully dressed, no sign of any struggle and she appeared to be asleep. There was no response when Joe shook her and shouted her name. Nothing.

He went to feel for the pulse in her neck. Nothing.

He picked up her wrist and found no pulse, so he pushed up the sleeves of her jacket - there were at last six recent needle marks on the insides of each arm.

Oh, God! Joe thought. *What the hell is happening here? Diana did not do drugs... First Catherine, now Diana - what the hell is going on?*

Joe felt sick and appalled by her death. He liked and admired Diana a lot. He turned to the two police officers.

"Get this place sealed and off limits." Then he went to Diana's phone and rang the police department.

It was the middle of the morning before Joe arrived in his office, unshaven, in need of a shower and a clean shirt - and some breakfast, or maybe, lunch.

Now he had taken over Moreno's job as DA, at least he had access to these facilities which was nice, but he missed being downstairs on the floor of the DA's office, in the thick of it. The loneliness got to him sometimes

and the business with Moreno had badly damaged Joe's ability to trust anyone. He missed Cathy, he missed her friendship and her honesty and the trust they shared without question. He thought of her, often.

He would miss Diana Bennett too and, over the past months, she had become someone he could trust. Though she preferred to work alone and was never very forthcoming with information, he knew she was not out to deceive him, but just liked to get all the information together first.

Hell, what a mess! he thought. *What a God-awful world this is!*

The coroner declared that Diana had died from a drug overdose and there did not seem to be any suspicious circumstances.

Joe decided - for the moment - to let it go as an accidental death - it might just bring somebody crawling out of the woodwork. The fact that he knew she had been murdered, he kept to himself.

By six o'clock, Joe had had enough and went home early. He was desperate for a few hours relaxation, a leisurely bath, followed by one of his mother's lasagnas he had in the freezer and, apple pie and ice cream for dessert. Then he would crash out in front of the TV.

Since taking over from John Moreno, he had not had a break. His days stretching to fifteen and sixteen hours, plus taking work home. He would have to think about taking some time off soon, before he went completely nuts.

It was almost nine o'clock, a filthy black night outside, rain lashing against the window and Joe was glad to be inside. The telephone burst into life and Joe cursed quietly as he lifted the receiver.

"Yeh?"

"Joe Maxwell?"

It was the same voice that had sent him out to Diana's apartment that morning.

"Yes, this is Joe Maxwell - who the hell are you, and what do you want? Did you kill Diana Bennett?"

"Mr Maxwell, I want to help you and in doing so, I am signing my own death warrant. If you go down to your letter box in the foyer, I have dropped a key inside. It is to a luggage locker at Grand Central Station. You will find there, a briefcase. Guard the contents well. Miss Chandler and Miss Bennett died to protect what you will see."

The phone clicked and hummed with the dialling tone.

As the anonymous caller had promised, the key was in his letter box. Joe knew he would never sleep until he got to the bottom of this, so he pulled up the hood of his waterproof, braced himself against the weather and hailed a cab.

It was a little after ten when he arrived home, wet, bedraggled, with the mystery briefcase.

He dried himself off, went to the fridge for a can of beer, then investigated the contents of the briefcase. There were six, two-hour video tapes numbered one to six and annotated as extended play. He inserted the first into his VCR and soon realised they belonged to a video security system.

In stunned, sickening silence, he watched how Catherine was tortured with drugs, saw her in solitary confinement while she was pregnant; saw her give birth - and saw her baby being taken away.

And he saw, what looked like something out of a horror movie that had been taped in by mistake - a huge beast-like man, enormously powerful.

"What the hell is this? Oh, God, I can't cope with this on my own, I need someone to talk to."

He felt totally out of his depth and, although he did not want to admit it, he was scared. He did not know who to trust, but he wanted some answers. Who would know enough about Cathy, to be in on something like this - certainly not Jenny.

Since Cathy's death, he and Jenny had spent a fair amount of time together, and Joe felt he would have known if she was hiding something - something like this.

He knew there had been a man in Cathy's life - a man called Vincent - but so far he had never materialised.

Peter Alcott came to his mind; not just her lifelong family friend, but also her doctor. Well, he would never harm her, or her memory and he might just know something.

He looked up Peter's phone number and dialled. A sleepy voice answered. "Peter, I'm sorry to wake you, it's Joe Maxwell. I need your help."

Peter was equally sickened and distressed by what he saw on the tapes, not just by what they did to Catherine, but what they did to Vincent, in the cage. Joe had been watching Peter's reactions to what was on the video tapes.

"Peter, you know about this man-beast creature, don't you?"

Peter stopped the tape and turned off the television. He took a deep breath. "Joe, I have known Vincent since he was a tiny baby."

"Just a minute!" Joe butted in, hardly able to believe what he'd heard. "Don't tell me this... this man-beast creature, this freak, is Vincent, the man in Cathy's life?"

"Yes, Joe, this is Vincent, the man in Cathy's life. Vincent is her life."

"But Peter, he's not human!"

Joe's voice was raised almost in panic. He felt a mixture of revulsion and disbelief.

"Joe, I know what we have seen on those tapes, is both unbelievable and shocking but, believe me, Vincent is the most human being you are ever likely to meet. He is also the most gentle, caring, generous hearted man, I have ever had the good fortune to know - my world would be a very empty place, without Vincent."

Joe sat quietly now, absorbing this new information. It was not at all, what he had expected to hear and he was very tentative as he asked, "Peter, the child Cathy gave birth to...?"

"Vincent's child - yes, Joe," Peter nodded.

Joe's feelings of horror and disbelief returned and were causing him to tremble with shock.

"Catherine and this creature were lovers?" Joe's revulsion showed all too clearly on his boyish face. "She wouldn't, she's too beautiful, she could have had anybody," and his voice faded away.

"Yes," Peter agreed. "But there is only one man for Catherine, and that is Vincent."

Joe just kept shaking his head and Peter continued.

"Joe, listen to me. Catherine and Vincent share a love that defies all definition, it transcends all the differences, it just is. It breaks all the rules and medical impossibilities. We no longer question it, we just glory in the miracle of it."

"Peter, you are talking as if they are both alive."

"Yes, I am, aren't I?" Peter smiled. "Look, Joe, I am going to take it upon myself to tell you something about Vincent and Catherine, and the love they share. Then I am going to make arrangements to come for you

tomorrow evening, as soon as it is dark, around seven o'clock and take you to meet Vincent and the man who raised him as his son. But Joe, whatever is revealed to you, must remain a secret. The lives and safety of a great many people depend on that, including mine - and yours.

"Vincent is very special to us all - we love him and he needs our protection, because he cannot live in this world. Catherine gave her life to keep him safe and the child she was carrying - his child, the chance to live - something of her for Vincent to hold on to."

Joe was overawed by all of this and sat with his head in his hands, trying to take it all in. Looking up, he said, "Peter, was the baby ever found?"

"Oh yes, Vincent had help from someone you know - Diana Bennett."

The colour drained from Joe's face. "Peter," his voice was little more than a whisper. "Diana was murdered and left in her apartment this morning. Her arms were shot full of needle holes."

Peter slumped and sighed in despair. "Oh God, Joe, will it never end? Vincent is going to be devastated; they became such good friends."

"Yes, Peter. I will miss her too."

"Joe, what are you going to do with these tapes?"

"Destroy them! Right now!"

"Good. I'll help you."

PART SEVEN

In the early hours of that same morning, a helicopter took off from the roof of the skyscraper, where Cathy had been held. It was carrying the man in charge of their corrupt organisation and four of Gabriel's men, to a yacht, anchored out at sea.

The doctor, the nurse and two other men, were left behind to finish crating up all the equipment to be shipped out later - then the floors they had occupied for the past fifteen months would be vacated.

The helicopter was well out to sea, when, without warning, the engine stalled, the rotor blades stopped and the helicopter plummeted, exploding into a ball of flame before hitting the water. There were no survivors.

The cause of the accident was a small act of sabotage on the fuel supply, by a doctor who wanted to even a few odds.

The doctor, two men and the nurse, continued packing the equipment into crates, wanting to be away from the place before daybreak.

The doctor moved to the other side of the room they were working on, drew a tranquilliser gun from his pocket and coolly fired a tranquilliser dart into each of them.

Within several seconds, all three of them had collapsed onto the floor. He then injected them with a more than fatal dose of morphine.

Just over an hour later, he quietly left the building.

Just before dawn, Peter entered the tunnels via the 14th Street entrance. He tapped gently on the pipes and waited for one of the sentries to come for him. He did not have long to wait.

Peter talked with his dearest friend, for over an hour, telling Jacob what had happened; about the video tapes and Diana's murder. They both agreed that Joe should be brought Below, to have everything revealed to him -

he had proved himself by destroying the tapes - evidence of Vincent's existence, that could destroy their world.

Peter left Father to tell Vincent and Catherine what had happened - except about Diana's death - Joe had insisted that he tell them about that, himself.

Joe arrived in his office at nine-thirty, wondering how he was going to concentrate on the more mundane events of the day. His mind had been in a turmoil all night, with thoughts of Catherine and Vincent and all that Peter had told him. He was very apprehensive about meeting Vincent and telling him about Diana. Whatever possessed him to volunteer for that job, he had no idea, but part of him was intrigued and looking forward to Peter coming for him that night.

Joe had another hectic day and it was late afternoon when Rita knocked and entered his office, closing the door behind her.

"Joe, sorry to bother you, but there's a man out here; insists on seeing you - he won't give his name and seems very nervous."

"What's he look like, Rita?"

She shrugged and pulled a face.

"Middle-aged, bald."

"Okay, show him in and hold any other calls or visitors."

Joe did something he could never remember doing before - he checked his revolver in the top drawer of his desk.

Rita showed the man in, then quickly left, dosing the door behind her.

Joe shuddered, feeling his skin crawl. This was the same man that he and Peter and watched on those video tapes, forcibly pumping all those drugs into Cathy and, probably Diana, too. He made no attempt to hide the revulsion he felt, as he motioned the man into the chair at the other side of his desk.

Joe waited for him to speak and was surprised that the man appeared humbled.

"Mr Maxwell, it is obvious that you watched those video tapes last night."

"Why are you here? You are also the man who sent me out to Diana Bennett's apartment - I recognise your voice. Don't you know I can have you arrested for murder, right now?"

"Mr Maxwell, my life is no longer of any consequence to me. I came to you, because I know you are a good, honest man, who cannot be bought. I also know, that you care too much about exposing what Miss Chandler and Miss Bennett died for."

Joe had to ask him. "You did murder Miss Bennett?"

"Mr Maxwell, I had no choice - I was but an instrument and, for me, there was no escape either."

"So how come you are here now? Why are you helping me now?"

He looked down at his hands and then up at Joe.

"Many years ago, I too, was a good man; a highly respected doctor, with a nice home and a family - I made a mistake and, in a moment of weakness allowed myself to be bought, by Gabriel. I was drawn into an abyss of corruption and horror, from which there was no escape. I lost everything I cared about and nothing seemed to matter anymore. I did what I was told to do... and existed.

"Then, I watched a beautiful young woman go through hell, at my hands, and her only fear was for her unborn child - she would tell us nothing.

"When that half-man, half-beast creature came for her, she would tell us nothing about him, either - no matter what she was put through. How she was tortured. The courage and strength she showed was unbelievable - it was as if she was receiving strength from another source, and Gabriel was fascinated by her.

"When it became obvious that the child she was carrying was not entirely human and that she and this ... creature ... had been lovers, Gabriel lost interest in the woman. He wanted the child. It fitted into his corrupt, evil and perverted view of life. The horror of what he would do to that child did not bear thinking about.

"After the child was born and Gabriel took him away, I was instructed to give her a fatal dose of morphine. Well, I gave her less than a fatal dose and hoped that this superhuman strength she had shown throughout her ordeal would bring her through and allow her to live."

Joe got out of his chair and started pacing the floor, eventually sitting on the edge of the desk, facing the man.

"What about Diana Bennett?"

"Diana Bennett allowed her curiosity to run away with her. She wanted to know what the organisation was all about and she wouldn't let go. She was in danger of opening the whole can of worms - or maybe snakes, is a better metaphor. She was a very clever, persistent lady, who had to be eliminated. After all, she had killed Gabriel, to help that creature claim his child, and the man who took Gabriel's place, was equally interested in that mutation of a man and his son.

"Miss Bennett was put through the same torture treatment as Miss Chandler. She did not last long - she did not have Miss Chandler's source of strength, but she did go through the same hell, and she never betrayed her mutant friend."

Joe felt as if he was going to throw up and the man kept on talking.

"Mr Maxwell, I felt honoured to know these two ladies - their courage was awe inspiring. For the first time in many years, I allowed myself to feel ... ashamed, because I never had the courage to stand up to these evil monsters. I allowed myself to be forced into performing the most horrific acts of subtle torture, on defenceless people. Well, the worm turned. I got those video tapes to you; I sabotaged the helicopter so that it would not reach its destination and I have killed the two men and the nurse, who were left behind with me, to tidy up. I have also destroyed all the video tapes that were left, in case anything was on them."

Joe stood up again, wondering what the hell this man was after.

"And now, I suppose, you will want to use all these good deeds as bargaining power?"

"No! I have the set of keys here, to the premises we have occupied for the past fifteen months - the address and details are on the label, and there are three bodies that will need disposing of. Mr Maxwell, there is something else I must stress. If Catherine Chandler is still alive, guard her well; these people don't give up. They have men and women planted at all levels, watching and waiting."

Joe nodded. He was sickened by the whole business.

"I will make arrangements for you to be taken into custody." He picked up the phone, wishing he could bring himself to thank the man. He never noticed him put his hand to his mouth and burst a cyanide capsule with his teeth. Joe only saw him fall heavily, forward onto his desk. He was dead and Joe had not even asked him his name.

PART EIGHT

Peter collected Joe in a cab, driven by one of their helpers, who made sure they were not followed.

Joe was impressed.

They drove into China Town and entered the tunnels, via a secret entrance at the rear of a warehouse.

Peter had already told Joe that unfortunately, he would not be able to go Below with him, because he was on emergency call out at the hospital, but someone Joe knew, was going to meet him and take him Below: Peter refused to enlarge on that.

A man approached along the dimly lit tunnel. He was quite tall, his hair and full beard, neatly trimmed and, on closer inspection, Joe could see his hair was long and fastened back.

The man approached Joe with an amused smirk on his face and held out his hand in greeting.

"Hello, Joe, it's good to see you."

Joe took his hand, somewhat puzzled, staring at his still gaunt and scarred face- then recognition dawned.

"I don't believe it ... Elliot Burch! You're supposed to be dead!"

"Yes, I know and by all the odds, I should be. Someone up there," and he pointed skywards with his finger, "must have been watching over me - maybe thought I was worth saving."

"Well, I'm glad to see you're safe, Elliot."

Peter shook hands with him. "You look better every time I see you, Elliot - you're obviously getting well looked after."

"I could not have better care, anywhere in the world, Peter," he said with great sincerity.

Joe wondered what he must have suffered to have killed off the flamboyant Elliot Burch.

Peter apologised for having to dash off, then left them alone to go Below.

Kipper was going to meet them, to guide them along the more complicated final section.

Joe was confused. "Elliot, I didn't realise you were so involved with all of this - and you know this - you know Vincent?"

"Yes, Joe, I know Vincent and feel honoured and proud to call him my friend. Don't look so worried, you are in for a few surprises."

After a moment or two of silent walking, Joe asked, "Elliot, what happened? Your whole empire has gone."

Elliot nodded. "That man, Gabriel and his organisation had me sewn up tight, Joe. Held me, so to speak, by the short and curlies. If I hoped to survive at all, I had to betray Vincent - that was the deal - and I was going to, right up to the last moment. I mean, he's only some freak, a mutation of a man, he shouldn't be allowed to live, anyway." He looked at Joe and sighed. "That's what I tried to tell myself, Joe, to justify leading him into a trap and, with him dead, I'd have a chance with Catherine. That's what I thought. But Vincent stood there, so powerful, yet so vulnerable and I couldn't do it. Let me tell you, Joe, it was the best snap decision I have ever made in my life."

Father greeted Joe warmly. "Joe, we have heard so much about you, from Catherine, over the years, you don't seem like a stranger at all."

Joe was mesmerised; gazing around him like a boy in Aladdin's Cave. "This is incredible - I mean, no one would believe all this exists below New York."

Smiling, Father said, "I take it you are impressed, Joe?"

Joe took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Yes, Jacob, I am overwhelmed and it's well worth all the precautions you take to keep it safe. Thank you, for allowing me to come here."

"You are very welcome, Joe."

Mary came in with a tray of tea and was introduced. Then Father spoke. "Joe, I know Peter has told you a lot about our world and, because of those video tapes, you know something of Vincent?"

Joe nodded and looking slightly apprehensive, said, "Yes."

"Don't look so worried, you will be surprised by what my son is really like." Father was smiling, as he looked towards the steps to see Vincent standing there. "Ah, Vincent, that was well timed - come and meet Joe."

Vincent had taken pains with his appearance, not wanting to let Catherine down. He had on a cream aran sweater, a light brown tunic top and cord pants. His golden mane had been freshly washed by Catherine and his blue eyes gazed at Joe in friendship and gratitude.

Joe stood transfixed with his mouth open, overawed by this man's presence. He had not expected him to be quite so ... magnificent.

Vincent came forward. "Joe, I am very happy to meet you at last, though I feel I know you already, because of Catherine."

They shook hands. Joe still had not spoken and stood, staring at the clawed, hairy hand, enveloping his.

Vincent let go of him and stood there good-naturedly, waiting for Joe to gather himself together.

Vincent's voice had come more of a shock than the rest of him. Joe coughed and laughed nervously.

"I'm sorry, Vincent, I really am glad to meet you too. If Cathy were here, she'd say something like ... 'Joe Maxwell lost for words, never!'" and they all laughed at his attempts to mimic her.

From the other side of the chamber, Catherine spoke. "Yes, and I never thought I'd see the day! Definitely a cause for celebration."

Joe searched Vincent's face for the confirmation of what he had heard and Vincent nodded, smiling.

Joe turned round and there she was, dressed in a deep pink polo neck sweater and blue jeans, with her hair loose around her shoulders.

"Cathy!" he cried, his voice cracking in disbelief.

Joe did not know how it happened, but Cathy was in his arms and they were hugging each other tightly. Then to Joe's embarrassment, all the stress and emotion of the past few days welled up inside him and although he made a monumental effort, he failed and sobbed uncontrollably, in Cathy's arms.

She held him, rubbing his back. "It's all right, Joe, it's all right. There have been so many tears shed down here, it's a wonder we're not swimming about," and they pulled apart, smiling tearfully at each other.

"I'm sorry, Cathy, I needed that."

"I know you did, Joe. Come, let's have that cup of tea," and she led him over to the table where Father, Vincent and Elliot were seated.

Samantha came down the steps, with baby Jacob in her arms. Catherine relieved her of her charge.

"Thank you, Samantha."

"Thank you, Catherine. I wouldn't like to carry him very far."

Catherine laughed. "I know what you mean." Turning to Joe, she unceremoniously dumped her son onto his lap, knowing full well he was used to handling small children.

"Here you are, Joe, meet Jacob, our son!" and Vincent came and stood behind her, tall and proud.

"Well, hello there, little fellow," and Joe lifted him up and sat him on the edge of the table, where he gurgled happily. Joe laughed. "I don't know about little fellow, he looks more like a little Catherine to me - you sure he isn't - aren't you?" and everyone laughed.

When Jacob had been taken to bed, with Samantha baby sitting, Father, Elliot, Joe, Vincent and Catherine, sat around the table. Father was the first to speak, mainly because he felt Joe needed some help in getting started.

"Vincent, Catherine - there is some sad news, that I was asked not to pass onto you this morning, when Peter left. Joe felt it would be better coming from him.

"Joe?"

Joe coughed nervously. "Yes, well ... this morning it seemed like the right thing to do," and he looked across at Vincent, whose penetrating blue eyes seemed to look straight through his head and pick the words out of his brain.

Vincent stated the only thing it could be. "Something has happened to Diana?"

Joe nodded dejectedly.

"Joe," Vincent's voice was quiet. "Tell me what happened."

Joe took a deep breath. "We had been trying to find her, to get in touch with her for almost a week - which was not at all unusual for Diana. She often worked undercover and always worked alone. Constantly checking up on her could put her in greater danger than the danger she faced every day. She knew the risks, she knew what she was doing and she was good at her job. She was still investigating Gabriel's organisation - it fascinated her. We had many rows about it and I begged her to give it up, because of the danger." Joe shrugged. "She just carried on, in her own time." He looked across at Catherine and their eyes met. "Diana was tortured with drugs; the same way you were, by the same doctor."

"Oh, God, Joe, she wouldn't survive that!" Cathy cried.

"She didn't survive it. She was left in her apartment - dead."

Vincent sat with his elbows on the table, supporting his head in his hands.

"It's all because of me; because of me," and he spat the words out, thick, with self-loathing.

Catherine got up and went to his side, pulling his nearest arm free, which went automatically around her body and she gathered him to her. "Listen, my love, none of this is because of you."

He pulled away from her, pushing the chair back from the table.

"Oh no you don't, Vincent, you're not going off somewhere to brood about this," and before he could get up, she had squashed herself onto his lap, between his body and the table. "My Vincent, you are going to hear me out," and she squirmed around on his lap so she could see his face. "You are no more to blame for Diana's death than I am, or Joe, or Elliot. We have all been caught up in the tentacles of this corrupt and evil organisation that Gabriel was only a part of. The sanctity of human life means nothing to these people - their only God is wealth and power and corruption.

"Don't you realise, Vincent, that if you had been just an ordinary man, coming to rescue me from that warehouse - even if you had been built like Rambo - you would have been no interest to them and neither would I. Vincent, it was your difference that kept us alive, allowed our son to be born - and kept me alive," and the tone of her voice changed as tears spilled down her face.

"Vincent, even though our bond had been broken, you were still with me, giving me strength and keeping me alive. Even when I should have been dead, you kept that spark of life going inside of me."

The silence in Father's chamber was total, as they all listened to Catherine's voice and Joe felt as if he was witnessing some kind of miracle, as Catherine continued.

"Vincent, even Elliot; knowing you, gave him that edge, that difference, just enough to keep him alive. Hasn't he told us himself, that the first thing he remembered, wasn't all his wealth and power, but you - you and your search for our son, and the comforting knowledge that he had not betrayed you."

Elliot cleared the lump in his throat and spoke. "She's right, Vincent - it was you that kept me alive and if it had not been for you, and all of this - " he motioned to his surroundings, "I would have been dead in some back alley by now."

Catherine continued.

"Vincent, it breaks my heart, that Diana has been murdered. I was looking forward to meeting her, to thank her for being a true friend to you, for helping us. But Vincent - Diana did what she did because she loved you; she would have done anything for you."

"No!" Vincent cried, shocked.

"She did. Do you think I am the only woman in the world who can find you attractive, Vincent?"

"I don't believe you, she was a friend, that's all."

The idea of any woman finding Vincent attractive was still alien to him.

"But Catherine is right," Father said. "She came to me herself, and told me how she felt about you; asked if there was any hope for her. I told her, that I did not think there was."

Vincent shook his head from side to side. "I never realised, I never realised."

Catherine stilled his disbelieving head and gazed lovingly into his eyes. "Hey, having a few women lusting after you, Vincent, is supposed to make you smile," she smirked tearfully at him.

He looked at her, his face softening with love. "But she's dead, Catherine - she died for us."

"Yes, but she did what she wanted to do, because she wanted to do it - no one could have stopped her and she knew all the dangers."

Joe endorsed what Cathy said. "Believe me, Vincent, the kind of work Diana took on, this could have happened any time and she knew it - that's why she always remained a loner; possibly the reason she was drawn to you."

Vincent nodded, finally convinced, but unhappy about it. "All right, I can accept that. Thank you, for making me understand," and he hugged Catherine to him, then reached across and shook Joe's hand, their eyes meeting with sadness, knowing each had accepted the other. "Thank you, Joe, for telling me about Diana, yourself, it has helped."

"I am only glad I was allowed to, Vincent."

Joe looked down at his hands, and then at Catherine, who was still sitting on Vincent's lap.

Father sensed his unease. "Joe, what's troubling you?"

Joe looked round them all, before telling them about the visitor he'd had that afternoon - the doctor who had finally turned on his masters and became an unlikely vigilante, then taking his own life in Joe's office.

Joe concluded by stating the obvious. "Cathy, Elliot, it is not safe for either of you to return to your lives - we can't be sure what is out there; who knows about you, who is watching."

Catherine spoke. "We know that, Joe. I've already decided that Catherine Chandler should remain dead, even though there are many friends I will never see again. I think it's better this way, and safer, not just for me, but for them too."

Elliot seconded that. "Elliot Burch will also remain dead. I shall return, but as Stanley Kazmarek, the name I was born with, and haven't used for over thirteen years. It's long overdue for a spot of recognition... and I am sufficiently disfigured to go unrecognised."

"Well," Joe conceded. "You seem to have things all worked out, but if you need any help, Elliot, with any documents, papers, or whatever, come and see me."

"Thanks, Joe... actually," and Elliot's eyes gleamed mischievously, "I do have some money and some diamonds, stashed away in an obscure bank in Mexico - I'd like some help to get my hands on that." Elliot grinned and so did everyone else.

Joe added humorously, "I might have known you'd have an ace in the hole!"

Father excused himself and retired for the night, leaving the young people to talk.

Joe glanced at Catherine, still curled up on Vincent's lap, hesitating before he asked her.

"Catherine, I know it would not be wise for you to go Above, but... surely, you don't intend burying yourself down here for the rest of your life and, I apologise if I'm speaking out of turn. I don't mean to be offensive."

"Joe," it was Vincent who spoke. "Catherine will always be a woman of both worlds, and it's what we both want for our son - the freedom to choose. Something, I fear, will always be denied to me, but as long as they have friends like you out there, I will be happy."

"I will always be there, Vincent."

"Yes, I'm sure you will be, Joe. But now, it's getting late. We will walk you to the Park entrance. I've arranged for a cab to be waiting on the bridge, at midnight, so that gives us plenty of time to take a steady walk."

Elliot left Vincent and Catherine to walk Joe Above and there was very little conversation along the way, but it was a companionable silence.

They reached the entrance ten minutes early and made arrangements for Joe to come again for a 'proper' visit. Joe hugged Cathy.

"I've missed you, kiddo - when I first saw you tonight, I had visions of you coming back to work for me; impossible I know."

"Joe, I could always work for you, down here - we can easily set up a delivery service."

"Are you serious, Radcliffe!" Joe said incredulously.

"Of course, if I can be of help, Joe."

"Well, I'll be damned!" and his face lit up with pleasure.

"I'll let you know when I can start, Joe. We still need some time... to heal."

Vincent shook Joe's hand.

"Thank you, for everything you have done, Joe, and for accepting... us. We have all suffered enough pain over the past twelve months, to last us a life time."

The Gods nudged themselves with ominous foreboding, because for Vincent and Catherine, the suffering was not yet over and the next few months would prove to be the greatest test, that their unique love had been put to.

PART NINE

It was a time of peaceful healing, and their world was getting back to normal.

Young Jacob was now ten months old and was already walking. With someone's hand to hold onto, he happily trotted round the tunnels, managing short distances unaided - if somewhat wobbly - on his sturdy little legs.

By now, he had quite an extensive vocabulary, more than most children his age, and chattered away from the moment he opened his eyes in the morning. Needless to say, he was adored by everyone.

He was special.

He was Vincent and Catherine's son.

In the tunnel world, the risk of discovery was not their only fear - there was also the very real fear of disease and infection. No one ever forgot the nightmare of two years before, when a stowaway Russian sailor, chasing a lost love across the world, arrived sick and in need of care. He was allowed to stay, but died without recovering. Then it was discovered that he had brought the dreaded plague; otherwise known as the 'black death', into their world.

Had it not been for all the modern drugs and antibiotics, so generously supplied by Peter and, the tireless nursing by everyone who was able - including Catherine - many more of their people would have died than actually did.

Death is tragic at any time, but when it is a child who dies, it touches everyone, and Ellie's death affected the whole community. A feeling of helplessness and despair hung over them for some time.

The children were inoculated against all the usual childhood ailments, as a matter of routine and whatever other economies had to be made, this was never one of them.

Vincent had always been a problem and a worry to Father, because his biochemistry was so different; his body could tolerate neither human drugs nor the veterinary equivalent.

Vincent was frequently ill as a child and Father, had to resort to the well-tried old fashioned cures and herbal remedies - and, of course, prayers.

Now Father was reliving these same fears for his grandson, hoping his precious little boy had inherited the same resistance to disease and the same power of recovery, that his father had.

It was visitors to the world Below, who began to comment on how quiet Jacob had become, since his first birthday. Joe passed a remark about it, when he came to collect some work, that Cathy had done for him; and then Elliot, who had been away for about three months, also noticed a change in him.

A tiny seed of fear was sewn within Vincent, Catherine and Father. Vincent and Catherine awoke simultaneously, both of them feeling, through their bond, without the need for explanation, that something was wrong with their son.

He still shared their chamber, though now he was fifteen months old, his cot was placed in a quiet corner and at night time, a colourful screen, decorated with nursery characters, was placed around his cot, to keep out any draughts and give them some privacy.

Jacob lay there, whimpering, wide-eyed and fretful. Catherine felt his small body.

"God, Vincent, he's wet through and burning up!"

"I will go and fetch Father."

Vincent stuffed his feet into his boots, wrapped his cloak around himself and fled out into the chilly tunnels.

Whilst he was gone, Catherine removed Jacob's wet clothes, sponged him down and by the time they returned, he was dressed in fresh night attire and guzzling a cool drink of juice.

Apart from his high temperature, Father could find nothing wrong with him, he was in no pain and did not seem to be teething. All they could do was to keep him cool and comfortable.

It was forty-eight hours later, before his temperature returned to what was normal, for him, but he remained pale and listless. Peter was asked to have a look at him and agreed with Father, that he could well be anaemic, and recommended a herbal iron supplement that would be safe for him to take.

A few weeks later, they realised he was not improving and this pale, listless little boy became irritable and his 'differences' became predominant. He frequently growled at anyone who came near and once, actually bit one of the children, which for him, was totally out of character.

Jacob also slept a good deal of the time - which again was unusual - and went right off his food: that was unheard of.

He was also losing weight.

Peter decided to risk getting some blood tests done - this was always dangerous, in case some astute technician saw something he had never seen before and wanted to make something of it.

Vincent and Catherine could not rid themselves of their sickening feelings of fear, that neither of them dare put into words. They stayed close to each other, their physical closeness helping to keep a lid on their fears, and the cheerful front they put on fooled no one.

Father was quiet, not wanting to acknowledge what he suspected the outcome of the blood tests would be.

"Dear God!" he cried, "Please don't let this happen!"

And he shed hot, angry and frightened tears, alone in his study.

Mary took Peter straight to Vincent and Catherine when he returned that evening. She did not ask; she could plainly see it written on his face. He was tense and drawn and she was glad she had left Jacob in the nursery, until after Peter had been.

She left the three of them alone.

Peter sat at the table, with Vincent and Catherine sitting opposite him.

No one spoke.

Catherine jumped up with a false sense of brightness, intending to ask Peter, if he would like a cup of tea, but she found her mouth would not work and her legs went to jelly. Vincent reached out for her, pulling her onto his lap, feeling her fear, which matched his own.

He was the first to speak, though his voice sounded strange to him and seemed to be coming from somewhere above his head.

"Peter, please tell us."

Peter sat stiffly in his chair, trying to maintain some kind of control, while he told them his heart-breaking news.

"Vincent, Cathy, there is no easy way to say this. Jacob is suffering from a form of leukaemia. He is not making any red blood cells and his blood count is desperately low." He coughed and looked from Vincent to Catherine. Their faces were ashen and Catherine was whimpering.

"No, no..."

"I am afraid there is nothing we can do, Vincent. There is no way we can give him a blood transfusion, even as a temporary boost - his blood is as unique to him, as yours is to you, which also eliminates a bone marrow transplant - and, as you know, any drug treatment is out of the question."

Vincent heard himself say, "How long has he got?"

"Weeks, as opposed to months." Peter's control finally snapped and he started to sob. He was far too close to all of this.

No one saw Father enter the chamber and he had obviously heard everything. He limped across to where Catherine and Vincent were sitting at the side of the table. His eyes were wild and his face a seething mask of fury.

He thrust his face in front of Catherine's, dropping his stick on the floor and holding the chair arms, so neither of them could escape his vicious tirade.

"You!" he spat at her, "Why couldn't you have died out there in the park! All you have ever brought us is pain and death and risk, to our world!"

Father was quite out of control and Catherine was oblivious to the spray of spittle that covered her face.

Peter, his own face wet with tears, was behind Father, trying to pull him away. "Jacob! Jacob! Please come away; let's have you out of here, we're all too upset for all of this!"

Father swung round in anger, knocking Peter off balance and he fell heavily against the table and, slithered to the floor.

A growl began deep inside Vincent, as he firmly took hold of Catherine, lifting her slightly and slid out from under her, easing her behind him, onto the chair. The growl erupted into a snarl as in one fluid movement, he picked up Father's stick, thrust it at him and propelled him, without thought for his bad hip, towards the entrance.

Father continued screaming. "Vincent, she brings evil, here! Dear God, can't you see! It must end! She will destroy us all!"

Then Vincent roared, his teeth bared, causing Father to draw back in disbelief. "GET OUT OF HERE, FATHER! GET OUT! JUST GO!" the growl rumbling in his throat.

As if suddenly coming to his senses and realising what he had done, Father turned and stumbled away, sobbing loudly, leaning heavily on his stick - and the rumbling growl inside Vincent, slowly subsided.

Peter was hauling himself up off the floor as Vincent turned back into the chamber and he went straight to Peter's assistance.

"I'm all right, Vincent; just feel a bit bruised and shaken, that's all. Thank you," he said, as Vincent helped him to a chair.

Catherine was still sitting where he had left her, her knees drawn up under her chin, her arms clasped around her legs, her eyes wide and staring in her chalk white face and she was visibly trembling.

Vincent gently unclasped her hands, pulled her legs free, then gathered her into his arms and held her close. This was all it had needed, to burst the floodgates that had been building inside her and she cried loudly and angrily, as if her heart was breaking.

Peter opened his doctor's bag.

"I'll give her a shot of sedative, Vincent. It will help to calm her down."

"No, Peter," Vincent said. "This is something that needs to be let out, not suppressed - she needs to cry."

"Yes, of course she does, you're right. Well, I'll leave enough sleeping tablets for a couple of nights, in case she needs them. Vincent, it was the pain that caused Father's outburst. He worships that little boy."

Vincent turned to Peter, his blue eyes blazing. "And we don't, I suppose! Are we not allowed to feel pain too! There is no excuse for the vicious things he said to Catherine and I hope he is suffering for it!"

Peter stood there, bereft. He loved them all and was loyal to them all. "I'll pray for you, Vincent."

"Pray!" Vincent cried with venomous disgust. "What God would do this!" As a distressed Peter turned to go, Vincent called out to him again.

"Peter, I'm sorry, I didn't mean that - would you see Jacob is taken care of tonight. Catherine needs me - we need each other."

"Yes, Vincent, don't worry. I'll see to that for you - he'll be safe with Mary."

Catherine cried for hours in Vincent's arms, but was unable to sleep. So many conflicting and painful thoughts and feelings were fighting within her and Vincent could feel this battle going on. He suspected that it would match the battle going on within himself.

He pressed her to him and kissed the top of her head. "Catherine, I can feel the conflict in you, as it is, in me. I am going to make us some tea, then I think we should try and talk about it - the way we always do."

She nuzzled her face into his neck. "Yes, Vincent, I would welcome that."

They quietly drank their tea and Vincent had brought her a cool, damp wash cloth for her hot, swollen face.

Catherine was the first to speak. "Vincent, I don't understand myself. Peter tells us that our son is going to die and yet it is Father's outburst that is hurting me the most," and she began crying again.

Vincent drew her to him, soothing her with his hands. "Catherine, it hurts so much, because Father is always there for us, for everyone - we feel betrayed, deserted, he has let us down when we need him the most. He has not only withdrawn his support, he is blaming us for causing his pain."

"Blaming me, Vincent - for loving you."

"Catherine, if Father was ever to make me choose between him and you - he would lose. He is my father, you are my life."

The next morning, after they both managed to fall asleep for a couple of hours, Vincent automatically got out of bed, to see if Jacob was awake, forgetting for the moment, that he was with Mary in the nursery.

The impact of seeing the empty cot hit him in the chest with the force of a sledge hammer.

Catherine heard him say, "Oh, God!"

Then she saw him collapse onto his knees across the cot, sobbing as if his heart was breaking - which indeed it was.

She was over to him in an instant, pulling him from the cot and into her arms.

"Come on, my Vincent, just cry, let it all out. I'm here," and they both lowered themselves onto the floor and oblivious to their discomfort, stayed there until Vincent had cried himself out.

Father had barricaded himself into his bed chamber and refused to come out. He would accept neither food nor drink. He could not believe what he had done. Whatever had possessed him to behave the way he had? How could he apologise for such behavior - attacking Catherine, after all she had already endured, to protect them. Father would never be able to forgive himself, so how could he ever expect anyone to forgive him, either? His guilt and shame weighed heavily on him and he did not know how he would endure it.

"Why, oh why," he cried, "Do people always hurt the ones they love most in all the world?"

For Vincent and Catherine, the next two days were spent in a strange, unreal, shocked state. They had many fits of crying: would they ever stop, they wondered. Both Peter and Mary assured them that it was nature's way of healing.

Peter hoped that his oldest, dearest and at the moment, most stubborn friend, would stop playing the martyr and come out of his self-imposed prison, before it was too late.

Vincent was sitting in his chair, reading to Jacob, who was perched, like a king of the castle, on a pile of cushions at the side of him, secure within the circle of his father's arm and high enough to be able to see the pictures in the book. Catherine was quietly pottering, putting clothes away.

They all heard a sound in the entrance.

Vincent stopped reading and Catherine, went to his side. Their hands clasped. Father stood there.

In two days, he had aged ten years; seemed shrunken, neglected, unloved and afraid. He leaned heavily on his stick. No one spoke.

Vincent held Catherine's hand more tightly, his son more securely, and the three of them waited.

Father hung his head in the complete humiliation of someone who knows they have done wrong and does not know how to put it right.

At last, the awaited words were uttered.

"I'm sorry; I'm sorry, I am so sorry." His head came up and tears were coursing down his face as he sobbed, his shoulders heaving. "Catherine, please forgive me."

She was already across the chamber, gathering this very much loved Father into her arms; this very much loved Father who ran off at the mouth when he got upset or angry with those he loved; sometimes losing sight of rational thought.

She held him close, rubbing his back and shoulders. "It's all right, Father, I know you weren't angry with me; you just had to vent your anger and pain on someone and I was there, in the firing line... It's all right."

Catherine was now crying uncontrollably herself, but managed to say, "So long as we all stick together, we'll get through it," and at that moment, young Jacob picked up on their distress, opened his mouth wide and wailed his head off.

Vincent picked up his screaming son and wedged him between Catherine and Father, enveloping his small precious family to him, as fresh tears spilled down his face.

PART TEN

The next seven weeks was a bitter-sweet time for everyone, packed with so many treasured memories, made happy because they were so precious.

Jacob was a very poorly little boy, but everyone drew comfort from the fact that he was not in some large, frightening, unfamiliar hospital, but home with his family.

Then, without any warning, he was struck down with some mystery virus and died within hours.

Although many tears were shed, it was more from a sense of relief, that their loved little boy was no longer suffering and was safe and, at rest. Catherine liked to think that he would be with her own mom and dad and they would look after him.

The Great Hall was packed with all their friends and helpers. And flowers; there were flowers everywhere, not just in the Great Hall, but along the tunnels and in Father's chamber, where the food had been laid out on trestle tables.

Father Shapiro gave the most beautiful funeral service, making it feel special, different, almost unique.

Neither Catherine, Vincent, or Father were capable of taking an active part, but quite a few of their friends wished to read a prayer, or verse, or just to say a few words. Elliot, Joe and Peter, elected to do the bible readings and they all read beautifully.

At last, Jacob was taken to the special place, in the catacombs, that had been set aside for this purpose, many years before and the whole area, had been festooned with flowers.

Catherine, like most people, never gave death much thought - at least, not this part of it - but listening to Father Shapiro reading the burial service, she knew that this too, would be her final resting place, with Vincent and her family.

PART ELEVEN

It was the feeling of emptiness and loss of hope, that really got to them. The spirit of the whole community was in a state of melancholy.

For a while, both Catherine and Vincent still had a sense of him - a kind of spiritual presence. Sometimes they even heard him moving about in his cot at night and on several occasions, Catherine would hear him crying and would be halfway to him, before realising he was no longer there.

But now, even that illusion had gone. Vincent encouraged her to work and keep busy, and Joe kept her well supplied, not only with work, but with his support.

Vincent was kept busy on the lower levels, where there had been some flood damage and here, Elliot's expertise proved invaluable.

Catherine had gone out into the park every day with Jacob before his death and she still continued to do so, with Jamie, Lena and a few of the children, but sometimes she went alone.

Elliot had found a brownstone house up for sale in the village and, without hesitation he bought it, knowing it could be successfully connected up to their tunnel system and also, be a great asset to their community.

It was a spacious, well built, three storey terrace house, with a basement and a garden at the rear. The benefits it could offer to the tunnel community were enormous.

Elliot took on the job of its complete modernisation and gave it a security system that would not have shamed Fort Knox. For him, it was a labour of love. He insisted that it was his donation to the community, with grateful thanks.

Both Catherine and Vincent suffered overwhelming feelings of guilt and doubts about their right to love and to have conceived Jacob. They wondered if all the pain, horror and loss they had endured, was nature's way, or God's way, or somebody's way, of telling them that what they shared was wrong.

One evening, they were both feeling particularly low in spirit and they voiced their fears to Father.

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed. "What you and Catherine are suffering from, are the very normal and natural stages of mourning, that only time can heal - and it will take time. But I promise you, that each day, it comes a little easier. It never actually goes away, but you learn to live with it."

"Father," Catherine said, "I don't want to forget Jacob; I wouldn't, not have had him; he was part of our lives and I would like to feel free to talk about him."

Vincent drew Catherine's hand to his lips in silent agreement and Father smiled affectionately at her.

"Excellent, Catherine. That makes me very happy."

It was just over five weeks after Jacob's death and Catherine had gone for a walk in the park, alone.

The day was quite warm and sunny and, as usual, she wished Vincent could be with her. She sat down on a grassy bank and became lost in her daydreams, when a voice behind her brought her back to consciousness.

"Christopher, come to mommy, there's a clever boy."

Catherine turned around and there, on a flat section of grass behind her, was a young man and woman, standing three or four yards apart. In front of the young man was a little boy and Cathy caught her breath - for all the world, he could have been Jacob - a mass of golden, curly hair and sturdy little legs, teetering on the verge of his first solo steps.

His daddy hovered behind him and his mommy urged him on.

"Come on, Christopher, come to mommy," and she held out her hands.

All at once, he set off and took half a dozen steps before falling on his bottom.

Memories of Jacob's first steps, flooded through Catherine and though tears sprang to her eyes, happiness radiated throughout her body, filling her heart with joy and leaving no room for even a seed of doubt.

She scrambled to her feet and headed home, with an overwhelming need to talk to Vincent.

In the lower levels, Vincent suddenly felt an unexplainable surge of happiness. It enveloped him and he laughed out loud. These feelings were coming from Catherine, through their bond!

Catherine burst into Father's chamber.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Sorry to disturb you, Father. Vincent's not here yet?"

Father looked puzzled at her flushed and radiant face.

"No, Catherine, should he be?"

"I'm here," Vincent answered from the steps. He was covered in dust, a sweat band around his head; his shirt was damp and blackened with perspiration and Catherine was in his arms, clinging to him as if her life depended on it. He held her for a moment or two, then gently released himself. "Catherine, tell me what this is about. I felt your happiness - what is it?"

He gazed with amused and adoring eyes at her face, which was now smudged with damp dust.

Catherine plunged in with both feet. "Vincent, we have to try for another baby!"

"Catherine!" His face was a mixture of puzzlement, delight and shock.

She pressed on, gripping hold of his shirt front and shaking him slightly.

"Listen, Vincent, what we have is special, unique, something that has never been. If we don't have a child, when we die, there will be no one to carry on our dream - it will be as if we never existed. Don't you see, Vincent, we have to try, we just have to try!"

Vincent gazed at this woman of his, too overwhelmed to speak. Father stood there, not daring to say a word and Catherine carried on.

"Maybe Jacob died because of all the drugs that were pumped into me, while I was pregnant and all the stress and fear... it can't have helped..."

"Catherine," and he put his fingers over her mouth to quieten her. With mock seriousness he asked, "And when would madam like this ... er ... project to commence?"

Catherine started to giggle. "Well, now... would be nice."

"Catherine?" Vincent looked down at himself. "I'm not really dressed for it, I'm all dirty and sweaty."

They were quite openly flirting with each other, in front of Father, who did not know where to look, but was incapable of moving away. Catherine moved back closer to Vincent. She almost purred at him.

"I don't object to a bit of muck and sweat and, anyway, on you it's sexy - and you look like a pirate with your sweatband round your head."

Vincent was trying to control the plethora of emotions radiating throughout his body.

"So, I look like a pirate, do I? Well now."

Without further ado, Vincent bent forward and unceremoniously flung Catherine over his shoulder. She screamed and beat on his back in mock terror and they made for the exit.

Before leaving, Vincent swung round to Father, who had enjoyed their fun and was grinning from ear to ear.

"Father, you will excuse us, won't you?"

"Of course, Vincent, of course."

AND NOW...

The dancing lights had burnt very low in their chamber. Catherine and Vincent, had not realised how long they had been reminiscing their early, traumatic years together - celebrating the destiny that brought them together, on that dark night eighteen years before.

Giving thanks for a dream, that had become a reality - and in remembrance of a little boy, who had shown them what was possible and had given them the-courage to try again.

They also remembered, with gratitude and affection, a young woman called Diana, who had given her life to keep them safe.

For the past ten years, the brownstone house Elliot had contributed, had become their second home. It was simply known as 'Vincent's' and was an extension of their world, enabling Vincent to live a more normal life - with the sun on his face.

The garden had been transformed into an oasis of colour and greenery, with a sun lounge on the ground floor and a balcony on the first floor and both were screened and canopied to allow Vincent to enjoy the sunshine and open air, without the fear of being seen.

Father was now in his late seventies and had taken up residence there, with the full support and encouragement of the whole community, and he too, enjoyed all the benefits that 'Vincent's' provided.

The lights were turned low as they entered their comfortable sitting room.

All was quiet. On the settee, in front of the fire, was their precious family - grandfather, thirteen year old son, twelve year old daughter and their large golden labrador dog. They were all sound asleep.

Vincent and Catherine stood there, with their arms around each other, taking in this beautiful peaceful scene before them.

Vincent whispered, "I wonder, who is baby-sitting whom?"

Catherine giggled and whispered back, "I know we have got a pretty useless dog, but she's lovely."

"Yes," Vincent agreed.

"Vincent," Catherine whispered again, "I know I say this every year, but it can stand repeating... everything, all we have suffered, was worth it."

"Yes," Vincent whispered back, pulling her close...

END