

# Begetting the Rose...

Judith Nolan



*"But he who dares not grasp the thorn should never crave the rose."*

Anne Brontë

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## **Author's Note:**

*The BATB episode **A Children's Story**, is second to the Pilot in the Production Order. Viewed in its proper sequence, we see that, for the first time, Vincent leaves a red rose with a note for Catherine on her balcony table. She reads the note and immediately hurries from her apartment to go to him.*

*Why did Vincent leave the rose in the first place, when the note was in no way romantic? What were his intentions? Did he even have a clear idea, then?*

*And where did he secure such a perfect bloom, in the beginning of winter? It seems to become his habit, finding these gorgeous roses out of season...*

Verity hummed quietly as she completed the last wedding bouquet of her large order. She was well pleased with her work. She hoped her new customer would be, too.

She glanced at her wristwatch, and sighed. Distracted by what she loved doing, she'd lost track of time, again. It was nearly ten o'clock, and she really needed to be climbing the stairs to the tiny apartment above her shop.

She stifled a yawn with the back of her hand. She'd risen before dawn to attend the busy flower markets.

But the process of creating floral beauties always seemed to carry her away, and sleep was such a waste of precious time, anyway...

Of course, she knew she wouldn't have it any other way. It had taken many long hours, and a great deal of effort to make an ongoing success of *Panache Flowers*. Her shop on Duane Street in Lower Manhattan, suited her needs very well. Its only drawback, if there could be one, was its necessary distance from the home tunnels, where she had been born and raised.

She missed her family, and the other denizens of that hidden world, more than she could say. But she made the best of it. She went home as often as her work schedule permitted. She was pleased that there were also the frequent, and very welcome visitors, from her old life.

Of course, whenever flowers were needed for celebrations and parties Below, she happily supplied them. And Above, Lady May was a consistent patron, using Verity's skills whenever she held an important event, or her next official function.

Five years ago, the old lady had secured the lease on the shop, and generously paid the first year's rent in full. That was when Verity had first moved Above, to live and work. And to pursue her long-cherished dream of working with flowers.

She twined the last long, white ribbon around the blade of her scissors, drawing down the length, before allowing it to spring back into a satisfactory curl. She held the bouquet out at arm's length, considering her work.

"Okay, good..." She nodded.

A sudden frisson of awareness, travelling the length of her spine, told her she was no longer alone. "Hi, Vincent," she remarked, without turning.

A whisper of sound, and a soft footfall greeted her, before a low, masculine voice remarked ruefully, "No matter how quiet I am, you always seem to know when I am here."

"Years of practice. Besides, Narcissa says I have a strong sense for knowing things right before they happen. My Irish grandmother also had the gift of second sight. Or so I've been told."

"She must have been a very interesting woman. You are fortunate to have her gift."

"I certainly got saddled with her unruly red hair." Verity grimaced, as she tossed her long mane of copper curls back over her shoulder.

She glanced at her visitor. "But then, you always found me when we played hide and seek, remember? How did you always know where I was?"

"Easy." Vincent shrugged. "I knew you loved hiding among the baskets of dried flowers in the chandlery. You said you adored the flowers, and wanted to live among them." He looked around at the flower-filled shop. "You may well have had the gift of prophecy, my old friend. It did not save you from being predictable yourself, however."

"*Touché...*" Verity smiled, carefully setting aside the bouquet. "*You* are now becoming just as predicable." Her words carried no heat, just the warmth of long-familiar friendship.

Vincent knew she was correct, as they stood in the quiet, fragrance-filled shop, together. He was well aware that Verity was an only child, and that he was filling in the role of the big brother she'd never had. "Can I not just come by to make sure my little sister is well?" he asked. "Do I need any other reason?"

Verity gave him a long look of sisterly disbelief. She tried not to chuckle at him, but couldn't quite pull it off. The copper curls danced, as she shook her head.

"I thank you for your concern, Vincent. I really do. But, I think you are here to look at my roses, again. Is it the white ones, or the red, this time?" She indicated the vases of long-stemmed roses on her shelves. "I received a shipment of lovely yellow ones, just this morning. They're very beautiful."

Her narrowed gaze became considering. "Or are you here to tell me you're finally ready to make your selection?"

Vincent's thoughtful look deepened. "I believe I have finally made up my mind," he allowed cautiously.

"Ah, good." Verity wiped her hands on her apron. "If I was to guess, I would say you are wanting a bunch of...red roses." She shrugged. "A dozen always sends a good, strong message."

Her blue eyes twinkled, but she did not ask the question that was foremost in her mind. *Red roses stand for passion and love. Just who is the lucky lady? Do I know her?*

"A single red rose is all I require." Vincent's narrowed expression warned her not to ask. "It's for a message I wish to send. It is a simple token, nothing more."

"Very well." Verity sighed. "But, it must be a very powerful message that you need to accompany it with a symbol of love."

She longed to know, but he seemed ill at ease, and disinclined to elaborate.

She decided it was well past time she went home again. She would ask her parents, or Mary and Father. Surely they would know if Vincent was seeing someone. Such a major event in her adopted brother's life could not be kept a secret for very long.

He deserved the very best of everything. And the saddest thing was, that Vincent himself could not see it. She wanted the very best for him, as well.

"This one?" She reached to withdraw a single red rose from the large vase in front of her work station, and held it up. "Do you wish me to gift-wrap it for you?"

“No, thank you.” Vincent advanced to stand beside her, considering the exotic bloom. “It is the note that is important, not the flower. I do not wish...” He didn’t finish.

“I understand.” Verity took his large hand in hers, and placed the thorn-less stem of the rose across his open palm, before closing his fingers around it, with both of her hands. She then held him tight, looking up into his shadowed face.

“Whoever she is, she’s one lucky lady,” she said, softly. “You know where to find me whenever you need the next rose for her. Or maybe you’ll need a whole bunch, next time. If things go well between you.”

“There may never be a need for another.” Vincent’s boots shifted on the tiled floor of the work room. “For this time, I stand in need her help.”

He lifted the rose to his nose, inhaling the exotic scent. He closed his eyes for a long moment.

“Then, I am sure she will give you her help, if she can.” Verity watched his expression. “And don’t underestimate the power of the rose. If she is already your friend, then so much the better.”

She nodded towards a display in the shop. “I also have a new line in essential oils, should you ever need them. I don’t know, but aromatherapy is said to be the next big thing. I guess it could catch on. They say couples are really getting into it.”

“We are not a... she is not my...” Vincent avowed, before breaking off to inhale deeply. “She is not *my* anything...”

“Oh, Vincent...” Verity reached her arms up to hug him. “You are being too hard on yourself. You have so much to offer, so many gifts. Any woman would be proud to say you are hers, and she, yours. Are you so sure she doesn’t care for you?”

She could see a trip home was definitely needed. This mystery was just too intriguing.

"I do not know. At times, I have allowed myself to dream." Vincent stared at the rose he held. "But the realities of our situation are harder to ignore. She comes from a world far apart from ours."

"She's a Topsider?" Verity's eyes widened. "Okay..."

There was, of course, the tunnel talk of a dying woman Vincent had rescued from the park, some months ago. But that had been mostly speculation and conjecture. The true facts of the case were frustratingly scarce.

It was said that Father had been very insistent she leave as quickly and quietly as possible. He'd been extremely angry at Vincent for bringing her into their secret world in the first place.

Very few of the tunnel folk had met her and no-one knew much about her. Verity had not heard mention of the woman's name. It was said she'd recovered and returned to her life, in the world Above. As far as Verity was aware, Vincent had never seen her again.

"She is..." Vincent's sigh was eloquent and of things unspoken. Of things too painful to touch. Finally, he said, "She is my...everything, and yet..."

His gaze lifted to consider the wire stand full of wedding bouquets, and the look of pain in his eyes darkened. "Perhaps the rose *is* too much. The note will suffice. It is an urgent matter that can't wait. I will deliver it tonight." He placed the rose carefully on the work bench, and stepped back. "It can never be..."

"Never is a very long time." Verity stood on tiptoe to kiss his cheek. "Give her the rose, *and* ask for her help. Keep her close with things she can understand. The message of flowers is universal. Give her time, and maybe she will see how much you need her."

Vincent looked with longing at the single bloom, as if even this solitary gesture of love was a thing he couldn't be a part of. "When I see her, I am filled with a happiness sweeter than anything I've ever known. But, at the same time I am reminded of a life that can never be...and I feel great pain. We can never be together, you see. If it can be called anything at all, it is an impossible relationship."

"I'm afraid my advice on matters of the heart is rather limited," Verity admitted. "I may understand the language of the flowers, but relationships..." Her mouth thinned. "Of the few men I've dated, I can't say I've met any winners, so far. Certainly no-one I would think of taking home to meet Mom and Dad."

"And yet, you have such potential," Vincent replied slowly. "You're being too hard on yourself. You have so many gifts to offer. These men you have dated must be blind, if they do not see that."

"Stop quoting my own advice back at me," Verity grumbled, her cheeks warming with embarrassment. "I thought the role of agony sister was mine."

She picked up the rose, and closed his fingers once more around its stem. "Go on now, before you make me cry. Go to her. You know how I adore a good romance. Come and tell me how this one ends, when there *is* a happy-ever-after. And I know there will be one, I can feel it. Trust me." She leaned closer. "I have the sense of such things. Be well, Vincent. Hug your lady for me."

She pushed him gently towards the basement entrance to her shop. "Bring her to see me, one day soon. I would like that."

"You sound very sure." Vincent tucked the rose carefully within a pocket of his cloak, as he allowed himself to be moved further towards the exit.

"Like I said, I'm a confirmed romantic. I do believe love will conquer all, in time. You just gotta believe in the magic of serendipity." Verity smiled mistily. "And passion."

She pushed him harder towards the route down to the tunnels. "Now, get going. Go see her, and make sure she gets the message you wish to send."

"Thank you, Verity." Vincent bent to kiss the top of her head, before disappearing through the beaded screen leading into the back of the shop.

Verity watched him go, before pulling out her handkerchief and blowing her nose briskly. She wiped her eyes as she looked around at her work. "Now, where was I?"



*When the night has been too lonely, and the road has been too long.  
And you think that love is only, for the lucky and the strong.  
Just remember in the winter, far beneath the bitter snows.  
Lies the seed, that with the sun's love, in the spring, becomes the rose...*

***Amanda McBroom (The Rose)***