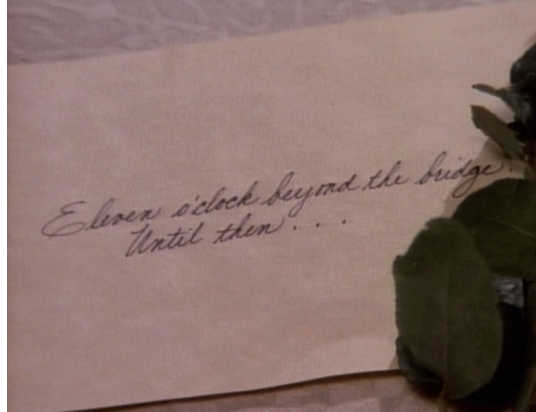


Beyond the Bridge...

Judith Nolan



"True happiness comes when you give your best in something beyond yourself..."

Jeffrey Fry

Author's Note:

*In the BATB episode **A Children's Story**, Vincent leaves a note with a rose for Catherine on her balcony table. She reads it and immediately hurries from her apartment to go to him.*

How did she know where to go? What messages or discussions have they had before this, so she knew exactly where 'beyond the bridge' actually was? Or did she simply follow his instructions, trusting him? Instructions we never saw in the episode.

Did they see each other at all, since she comments when they do meet at the barred gate, of not having seen him for some time?

Explanations for any of this is missing from the episode, which followed The Pilot in the Production Order. Therefore, in this fic, I have set out to remedy that situation...

“Vincent...? Are you there?” Catherine voiced her uncertain hope. An odd sense of him had rippled through her the moment she opened the door of her apartment. Now she was unsure of what she had felt.

She stood in the doorway, juggling her purse and a stack of legal briefs and investigation reports, as she listened to the silence. A whispered sigh of intense disappointment finally escaped her.

Of course, Vincent wasn't there. And she had to learn not to expect him to be. She hadn't seen, or heard from him, for weeks. He'd only visited her balcony once, on that first night. She had hugged him then.

After the long, gruelling day she'd just experienced, being held close in his arms was exactly the tonic she craved. The need burned within her, but he was not there to ask, and she had no way to contact him, Below.

He'd only stayed that first time, because she'd begged him to do so. Then he'd remained well past the time it was safe for him to leave. She was aware he had done that solely for her, which added to her already heavy burden of concern for him. The dawn was breaking, before he'd finally scaled her building to the roof and disappeared from her sight.

Her need to see Vincent again was born of the isolation she now felt because of their shared secret. She had nowhere else to turn.

“Oh, Vincent, if only you knew how much I need you, right now...” Her shoulders slumped as she turned to engage all the locks on her front door.

She grimaced. Physical security did little to alleviate the weight of her emotional needs.

She carried the files into her bedroom, and dumped them onto her makeup table. They could wait, for now. She was not in the mood to concentrate on dry legal matters.

Her purse landed on her bed, before she pulled off her overcoat, dropping it onto the covers. She longed to remove her shoes, but again that nagging feeling she was not alone, made her pause.

“Vincent...?” she asked again, staring at the gauzy curtains masking her view of the balcony, beyond.

Her heart missed a beat. She took the two steps up to the balcony level, her out-stretched fingers reaching to push the curtains aside. Again, some indefinable need rippled across her senses.

Leaning close to the glass pane, she looked up and down the balcony. Could she see him there, waiting for her? That was how he had been the only time she'd found him; pressed back into the corner, silent and watchful, for her reaction. As if completely unsure of his welcome.

He had been about to depart again, after leaving her a book. A first edition of *Great Expectations*.

She'd picked it up, and then looked up to find him watching her. She'd been so relieved to see him again.

She'd dropped his book, and her handgun onto the balcony table, before she'd run straight into his arms. He didn't try to avoid her. He'd sighed deeply and held her very tightly, as if he never wished to let her go.

They had stayed that way for what seemed an eternity. As if they would never willingly part again...

It was only when they'd finally drawn back from each other that he saw her face for the first time. Her repaired and unblemished face...

Vincent had stared at her. "Your face..."

Catherine had hurried to smooth the sudden awkwardness. "They fixed it..."

"Yes..." Vincent had breathed, wonderingly.

Catherine bit her lower lip now, in consternation. She'd invited him inside, but he'd refused. She hadn't wanted to let him go, for fear he would vanish again. He did say that he should never have come here...

Catherine smoothed a tear from her cheek. Their relationship was so new and very fragile. She had no idea what to truly expect. At times, she was frightened he would disappear back into the underworld, where she could never find him again.

She frowned, turning her attention inwards. Despite her concerns, the feeling that Vincent needed, and wanted, something from her, would not be banished.

“But, what...?” Unlocking and pushing open the doors, she looked with forlorn hope towards the end Vincent had occupied. But the balcony was stubbornly empty.

“Oh, Vincent...” Catherine sighed her discontent.

She stood still, waiting and watching. But the passing of the night wind was the only movement she could discern. It rustled the leaves in her small greenery. She tried to imagine the moving shadows as a large, cloaked figure.

She wrapped her arms across her body, shivering in the cold night air. Her whole being ached. But all the rest was truly silence...

It seemed a long, hot shower and a warm bed were all the comfort she would have tonight. And the work files still demanded her attention.

She turned back towards her bedroom. It was only then that she saw the envelope, and the single red rose, on her tiny outside table.

She looked closer, seeing her name written across the corner in flowing script, above a crude map of Central Park, drawn in black ink. There was a small cross drawn in a remote corner of the park, well beyond the far end of Bow Bridge, and the lake.

She picked up the envelope, recognising the bridge that arched over the lake, from Cherry Hill to the Ramble. She knew the area well.

Her heart lifted with anticipation, and she smiled. The elegant Victorian structure was a very romantic place for a meeting.

But the cross marked a small, narrow path that seemed to run towards a remote drainage tunnel. An out-of-the-way place she had never been.

Why does Vincent wish to meet me there? Catherine wondered. Why not on the bridge? Perhaps he was being cautious in case we could be seen...

She lifted the red rose to her nose, inhaling the sweet fragrance. She well understood the language of flowers. Red was a potent symbol of love and commitment.

She dared to hope this unexpected gift meant something more. She prayed she would see Vincent again soon. Otherwise, why had he left it for her?

She frowned, wondering where he could have found the beautiful bloom in the beginning of winter. Perhaps a helper who sold flowers? Another mystery to add to the rest.

Truly curious now, she slit the seal of the envelope and removed the folded note inside. What she read there banished all her tiredness and sense of deep disappointment.

Eleven o'clock beyond the bridge.

Until then...

Vincent needs me!

It was enough. There was no time to wonder why, or what for.

Catherine didn't hesitate, as adrenalin kicked in. Hurrying back into her bedroom, she dropped the note and rose onto her bed. In her haste, she gave no thought to closing and locking the balcony doors again. Snatching up her coat, she headed for the door, and the planned rendezvous...



Catherine walked alone through Central Park. She moved quickly, alert to any possible danger, as Isaac's defensive training had taught her to be, but nothing stirred.

She walked across Bow Bridge, and left it behind, finally reaching the same deserted area of the park as Vincent had indicated on his map. She moved down the side of a bush-clad gulley, where a small stream ran out over a paved apron from a large drainage duct. The concrete tunnel disappeared into darkness...

Without hesitation, Catherine bent into the entrance, and followed the culvert all the way, until it ended in a large, sandy-floored junction where three tunnels met. She studied them all, but they offered no clues. It looked like a dead-end.

She visualised the map, and she was sure this was the place. She walked the floor in agitation, waiting for Vincent to appear, hoping her trip was not in vain.

It seemed like hours before he came walking slowly down the tunnel fronted by a barred steel gate. As soon as Catherine saw him striding towards her, she moved to the gate.

She gripped the bars, peering through at him. "Vincent..." she whispered, inhaling the sight of him.

He lifted her tired spirits and slaked her thirsty soul. She longed anew for his warm embrace, but she could not find the right words to ask.

Again he seemed wary of approaching her too closely. His expression was remote and considering. Perhaps she had misread the true meaning of the red rose he'd left for her.

Vincent came closer. "Are you well?" His query was low, and softly spoken.

Catherine sighed. "Yes. I've missed you so much... Are *you* well? I was so worried. I hadn't heard from you...something's wrong? What is it?"

Vincent huffed a long sigh. He remembered the words he'd said to Verity this same evening. "I fear this is an impossible relationship. When I see you, Catherine, I'm filled with a happiness sweeter than anything I've ever known...and at the same time I am reminded of a life that can never be... and I feel great pain."

"Yes..." Catherine moved closer, blinking back tears. "I know. So do I. Vincent... what will we do?"

Vincent's great shoulders lifted. "The only thing we can do. We'll endure the pain and savour every moment of the joy." He opened the gate and stepped out next to her.

"I needed to see you." He shook his head. "We don't have much time, Catherine. I need to tell you something very important. The children Below speak of a place called Ridley."

Catherine's brow creased. "Ridley Hall... the foster home?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes. It's not what you think."

Catherine looked confused. "It's supposed to be a very good one."

Vincent shook his head. "No, Catherine! Children are being hurt there."

Catherine studied his worried expression. "Are you sure?"

Vincent held her gaze. "I believe they are... These children have no one to protect them. We can't let them hurt the helpless ones... they must be made to feel safe. How can this be, how can this happen?"

Catherine gripped his arm. "If children are being abused in this place, I can stop it! I'll look into it right away."

Vincent watched her closely. "Be careful, Catherine..."

Ripples of awareness flooded his inner being. She needed him, and wanted something from him. He was keenly aware of what that desire was.

If only everything could be so simple...

Against all his father's sound and logical reasoning, he had visited Catherine's balcony. To reassure himself she was well. And to see her again, one last time...

He had seen her true face for the first time. Her beautiful, unblemished face, and he'd been glad for her. But at the same time, he'd been awestruck into wondering silence.

"They fixed it," Catherine had said, never explaining exactly who *'they'* were...

Until the tunnel children had brought him their concerns over Ridley, he had determined never to see Catherine again. It was too painful. But he needed her help in this urgent matter of the orphaned children.

Driven by forces beyond his control, he'd left her the note along with the red rose, a potent symbol of his growing affections. Saying with a flower, what he could not say, in truth. Once more, the right words, which had always sustained his life, and his entire existence, proved too difficult to express.

He could see now that it had been a mistake. Despite what Verity had told him about the future she said she could see. There simply could not be any happy ending for them.

He knew he should walk away. Finally end it between them, before Catherine got hurt. Before he said, or did, something he could not retract, or undo.

But his boots seemed rooted to the sandy floor. He could not move, he could barely even breathe. She was so near, and so very beautiful...

He wanted to savour this one, incredible moment of joy, just for a little while longer. He hesitated for only the length of a single heartbeat, before spreading his arms wide and inviting her inside. It was all he could do for her. It was enough. He felt her acceptance, and her gladness, sweep through him.

On a grateful sigh, Catherine went into his embrace, and the two wings of his great cloak enveloped her. She stood there, held close, and listened to the beating of his heart against her cheek.

For an eternity they stood there, each silently wishing they never had to part again...





“Each meeting occurs at the precise moment for which it
was meant.

Usually, when it will have the greatest impact on our lives.”

Nadia Scrieva