

The First Time You Touched Me...

Episode expansion of: **Once Upon a Time in New York**

Judith Nolan



Catherine,

I sit here, at Father's table, lost in awe and shock. I'm trying to write down my thoughts and feelings, as I always have, but they keep skittering off the page and running back to you. You rest in my bed. Do you sleep?

That thought alone fractures my breathing with such an intense longing. I wish I had the courage to return to my chamber, just to watch you sleep. I've watched you before, tossing and turning, in your tortured dreams. I've wanted to reach out and hold you, to soothe away your fears. It seems so right, and yet, all wrong. How did we come to this fraught impasse?

Tonight, you touched me for the first time. It was an unwary contact that should have meant nothing. I was feeding you some of William's potato soup, when you suddenly laid your hand on mine, for the briefest of moments.

I was utterly transformed. I was not quick enough to prevent it from happening. I was too entranced with your soft voice, I briefly forgot who, and what, I am. You reached out, in an attempt to not feel so alone and helpless, in your enforced darkness. Anyone would have done so. You wished only to make a human connection.

Instead, you found my hand. You flinched the moment you touched me. Of course you did, I do not blame you for that.

To your credit, you tried to cover your astonishment about what you found beneath your fingers. I drew back quickly, not daring to explain, as I fled from my own chamber to this one. Thankfully, it was empty. Father is attending to the sick in the tunnel hospital.

I needed the space to think, and try to make sense of what happened between us. I never meant for you to ever touch me. I must make sure you will never see me. That way lies only pain and confusion. I would not inflict that on you. There are no explanations for who, or what, I am.

Father has instructed that I get you out, as soon as you are well enough to travel. He was adamant I tell you nothing of my world. That edict I broke, as we both well know, because I needed to allay your fears and worry. I would never willingly, hurt you, never!

But Father is right. As soon as you are ready, it is best you leave us, and this place. Even though I am aware that my heart will break with the certain knowledge I can never see you again. I've already decided that Mouse will take you Above, when that awful time comes. It will be better that way. The break needs to be clean and permanent.

It must be so, Catherine. For your sake, and for the safety of all those I am honour-bound to protect. But you, my amazing Catherine, have already entered deeply into my heart. From the very moment I gathered you into my arms in the park, you settled into my troubled soul. There, I will keep you safe, always. Whatever happens, whatever comes, you are safe. You're safe, now.

Sleep, my love...

Always,

Vincent