

BEGINNINGS

by Kathy Bayne

Part One

It was a beautiful cool night, and Catherine sat contented and happy on her balcony, waiting for her Vincent.

He had been busy all week helping with some of the excavation work in the lower chambers, and she had been up to her eyes on a difficult case that resulted in her being totally occupied, leaving them no chance to be alone, or spend time together.

She sighed and closed her eyes. Just the thought of being with him filled her with such joy, it was amazing. Her love for him was a private and rare thing, but Joe was getting a little curious and beginning to ask questions about her private life. It wasn't like him, but she had a sneaking suspicion that his concern for her was more than as a friend and she didn't want it to cause a rift between them. They worked well as a team and she did have strong feelings for him - but only as a friend, nothing more.

Smiling a secret smile, she decided that one day she would find a way to explain things, but only when the time was right.

A shiver ran through her as a slight breeze escaped between the apartment blocks swirling around her balcony, so she returned inside for a jumper.

It was still early for Vincent, so she took her diary outside and decided to read it and bring it up to date. No one knew about this book - no one, except Vincent that is - and she made sure it was always locked. It had a small gold padlock on its front cover, and there were only two keys. Vincent had the other one. He had protested when she gave it to him for safe-keeping, but her explanation had changed his mind.

As she told him, he had his journals with his points of view on their relationship, she had her diary and her side, and apart from keeping them for the future, she felt if anything went wrong or happened to her, he would have the diary to read and remember.

Slowly, she read some of the pages at random and so engrossed was she in her reading, she didn't hear Vincent arrive, but all of a sudden felt him.

Jumping up, she fell into his embrace and they clung together a long time before either spoke.

"I missed you so, Catherine," and a gentle hand brushed the hair from her cheek.

"And I missed you!" Then she smiled her lovely smile at him nearly melting him on the spot.

"It has been a long week, it was busy but I felt alone, without seeing you." He sounded so full of emotion, Catherine's heart skipped a beat.

"I know, it was the same for me," and she hugged him close.

"Oh Catherine! You are so much a part of me now, I don't know how I would manage if anything were to happen to you." He looked deep into her eyes as he gently pulled her from his chest.

"Vincent, we are one." She smiled and lifted her hand to trace the line of his face. "I can't let anything happen, now can I?"

They quietly laughed together, feeling so at peace with each other and enjoying the touching and caressing that was part of their existence.

Finally they parted and sat to talk, holding hands as if one feared the other would disappear. The night flew by and all too soon they knew it was time for Vincent to leave. He turned her to him.

"Catherine, are you still coming Below to spend the weekend with us?" He tilted his head to the side and waited, already knowing her reply.

"You try and stop me!" she laughed quietly with a twinkle in her eye. "I'll be down in the morning after I've seen to my shopping." She looked into his beautiful eyes and was pulled towards him. Drawing back slightly she asked, "Shall I bring something for dinner, and perhaps Father could join us?"

"Hmm, yes, that would please us both." He smiled at her. "Thank you, Catherine," and kissed her brow, freely acknowledging his devotion and love to this woman. "I'll meet you at the basement entrance at - ?"

"Oh, how about eleven o'clock?" She was calculating things in her mind, and felt sure she would be ready by then.

"Good!" He was pleased, just knowing she would be with him until late Sunday. With a long sigh, he rose from his chair. "Now it's late and I should go." The regret in his tone jumped out to her.

"Oh Vincent, I hate this part. I always feel so empty when you leave." She clung to him as he tightened his hold.

Slowly pulling apart they just looked at each other, adoration for one another cascading through their eyes.

Vincent lifted his head, eyes shut tight, feeling all she felt, then without warning quickly lowered his face and kissed her lips.

Catherine was taken off guard, but not enough to stop her responding. It was a gentle, tender, lover's kiss, from their hearts, and they both felt its effect as one through their close connection.

With a husky whisper, he spoke quietly. "I love you Catherine; no matter what we have to face, never doubt that!"

His velvet voice was so sincere and loving she fell against him to hide the tears that were welling in her eyes.

"My love is equal to yours, Vincent, and between our worlds we have our problems, but love is not a material thing to be shifted, so believe in mine, as I believe in yours."

"I do, Catherine. You have proved yourself and your love tenfold, but sometimes I feel - I wish it were possible to give you so much more!"

"Sssh." Catherine put her fingers over his lips. "Not now, Vincent. I have you. For me that is all I want, forever."

One more tender kiss and he was gone, longing for tomorrow and the time they were to share.

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Catherine spent a restless night going over the advanced stage her relationship with Vincent had taken. Just thinking about it sent tingling sensations through her body, and a beautiful hope of what could be. She floated between reality and dreams, feeling his strength and love with every thought.

She stretched and sighed, a contented, happy smile spreading across her face. Jumping from her bed and going to the shower, her thoughts turned to the more mundane jobs to be done, like shopping and getting sorted out before her weekend Below.

Half an hour later, she shut her apartment door behind her, and dressed in jeans and an over-sized sweatshirt, she headed for the mini-market near her building. It was handy and she always did her shopping for the odds and ends she needed, there. Small though it was, it was full of fresh fruit and other items that the bigger stores lacked, not to mention the friendly faces that always had time to smile or speak to her.

"Morning, Miss Chandler," the young girl assistant smiled as she came in. "You're bright and early this morning."

"Morning, Jess. Yes! I'm going away for the weekend and wanted to get one or two things." Then lifting a wire basket, she headed for the fruit and cheese, her mind filled with happy thoughts of what lay ahead.

"Hi, Miss Chandler." A quiet voice caused her to look up into the beaming face of Tony Brown; older now - yes, quite a bit older by the look of his features.

"Tony, why hello," and she returned the smile. Her mind raced backwards to the time when young Tony's father was caught stealing, and how she and Joe had helped to put him on the straight and narrow. At the same time, Tony had been mixing with the wrong company, as his mother was ill and unable to hold the family together. Cathy had helped them and convinced Tony to return to school to complete his studies.

"You working here, now?"

"I am." He sounded very pleased with himself. "And if I do well, they will put me on the training scheme for executive office workers."

"That's great, Tony, I'm very happy for you," and she shook his hand.

"My dad's still working and mum's out of hospital now, too." He was obviously happy the way things had turned out. "Well, I'd better go now."

Cathy nodded and watched the young man head for the store area, and it felt good to see the results of some hard work that had paid off.

Turning back to the shelves, she hurried on with her task and got all she needed.

"That everything, Miss Chandler?"

"Thank you, Jess, yes," and she left with her carrier bags bulging.

Catherine was mentally going through the contents of the bags and was glancing down at them when she was suddenly knocked off her feet and sent flying to the ground.

"Hey, what the - " and looking about her, she saw a youth with blond hair stagger, then regain his feet, before giving her a quick look and heading down the first alley way.

Cathy didn't take long to get to her feet, but wasn't quick enough to catch sight of the boy, or in which direction he went.

"Damn it!" She slapped her arms to her sides and returned to her bags.

"Are you all right?"

Gathering up her things, the chemist next to the mini-market, bent to help her.

"Yeah, thanks, but what happened?"

"Oh, another robbery I'm afraid." He sighed as he gave her one of the carrier bags.

"Did he get much?"

He shook his head. "No, nothing this time, I don't think he's done this sort of thing before. He looked pretty scared." He glanced at Cathy with concern. "But he had a gun, and in my book that means he's desperate and next time, fear might cause him to do something he may not intend doing!"

"Phone the police, Mr Johnson, let them know what happened, perhaps they can help."

"Okay, Miss Chandler. You sure you're all right?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," and she headed home. At last Cathy made it back to her apartment and was glad to see she wasn't running behind schedule.

Rushing to get organised, the phone rang just as she was about to change and shower.

"Hello, Catherine Chandler."

"Hi, Radcliffe."

"Joe, I'm off this weekend," and she smiled at the voice on the end of the line.

"I know, but I just got a phone call about that attempted robbery near your apartment." He paused. "Did he get a good look at you, Cathy?"

"No, I don't think so, why?" She could hear the sigh at the other end. 'Joe?'

"I just want you to keep an eye open for him." He paused again, sighed, and she could hear him tapping a pencil. "This kid escaped from custody this morning, somehow got hold of a gun, then just ran like mad."

"Anyone get hurt?" She sat on the bed and took off her boots and started to unbutton her sweatshirt, with one eye on the clock.

"No! He's no criminal by accounts, but this kid is real scared and we are worried what he might get up to, so take care, okay?" His tender tones returned her attentions to the phone and she smiled.

"It's okay Joe, no need to worry, I'll be away this weekend with a friend."

"A friend, huh!"

She held back the laughter building up inside her, knowing Joe was desperate to know who and where. "I'm sorry, but I've got to go, he's waiting. I'll see you Monday."

"Okay! Okay! I got the message." He sounded huffy.

"Good bye, Joe!"

"Yeah, see you Radcliffe."

Replacing the phone and grabbing her robe, she rushed to the shower, longing now to be Below and away from these latest events.

Somehow, without trying, her thoughts went to the blond-headed boy ... or was he? It was so hard to tell; he was tall and well built, just his features portrayed a younger person. She thought about what Joe said, then saw the eyes - misty blue - with a pleading, somehow helpless look in them, begging for help.

She shook her head to clear him from her mind, as she transferred her thoughts to the one love of her life: Vincent.

"Oh Vincent," she whispered and dreamed a dream of hope that seemed more real than ever.

Less than half an hour later, she was scanning the flat before gathering up her bags, ready at last for her weekend. She had two bags prepared, one with food and the other with her clothes and a book for Vincent. Smiling to herself, she closed the door to her apartment and practically floated down the eighteen floors to the basement.

He was near, she could feel him and his longing was as strong as hers. They both knew this to be a special weekend, for new promises and dreams.

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Vincent was prowling. Father decided this was the right word, for since early morning, one minute he was here, next in his own chamber, then in the guest chamber, making sure it was perfect for Catherine.

He couldn't understand it, she had spent weekends with them before and Vincent had been full of joy at that time, but nothing as unsettled as he was this day.

"Vincent!" Father called his son.

"What? Oh! Yes ... Father ... " and he came over to sit beside him at the desk.

"You seem very on edge, Vincent, is everything all right between you and Catherine?"

"Things are wonderful between us, Father!" he replied, then just got up and left for his chamber, leaving Father completely confused and rubbing his forehead. Vincent knew he had Father wondering what was going on, but how could he explain to him his feelings for the woman he loved beyond all things?

After their short encounter last night he was full of hope and dreams that were becoming more real by the day.

He opened his journal to write, when Father came in, leaning on his walking stick.

"Have you got a minute, Vincent?"

"Of course, Father, please, come in." He looked rather sheepish as he was joined at his desk.

"Vincent, I can sense that this is a special time for you, and you know how much Catherine is a part of us, and that I love her dearly." He took a deep breath, then went on. "She has given you more in your time together than I had ever dared dream of for you. There seems nothing her love for you cannot overcome."

He smiled at his son and squeezed his hand. "nce, I would have been sitting here reading you the riot act, preaching caution and care, but now, knowing what I do about you both, I can only give you my blessing and tell you to go with your feelings, Vincent. You are both a part of something extraordinary, and blessed with a love so rare it's indescribable."

Pausing for breath, he held up his hand to prevent any interruption.

"As you know, I suffered through my own misjudgement for too many years. I don't want you to follow that same path! You love each other and I know that Catherine would die rather than hurt you, so be happy and spend what time you have, with love and understanding, and know I will not try and prevent you from doing anything your own judgement tells you is right."

Vincent sat speechless, watching Father in complete silence and wonder. He knew it must have been an extreme effort for him to have made this declaration of love and it filled him with great affection for this man who was, in all ways, his Father.

"Father, I - "

"No Vincent, please don't say anything." He smiled warmly at his son. "I should have said this before, but somehow, I think now is the right time, don't you?"

Vincent held his hand over Father's and with a muffled sound, rather like a controlled laugh, he nodded his head.

"Now I must go and prepare myself for Mouse."

"What is it this time, Father?"

"I dread to think. He wouldn't say." He rose and went off, shaking his head, deep in thought as to what Mouse had come up with.

Vincent sighed and stared into space a while before turning back to his journal. As he started to write, there was another interruption from Bruce, one of the men on duty in the tunnels.

"Vincent, can I have a word?"

"Please, come in. Is there trouble?"

"Yes. I think there could be, but I didn't want to alarm anyone, so I came straight here to you."

"What is it?"

"I was on duty at the higher level, near Catherine's apartment entrance and found a stranger - a boy - of about nineteen to twenty, wandering."

"Did he see you?"

"No, I was watching him from behind the viewing wall up there, and I followed his movements for over an hour." He stopped to let Vincent take it in.

"And then, where did he go?" Vincent was worried, Catherine would be coming Below, soon.

"Nowhere, he's still there, and Vincent - " he made a gesture of helplessness, " - he has a gun!"

"A gun!" Vincent rose, grabbing his cloak as he did so. "Say nothing yet, Bruce, not unless I send word." He turned to him as he left and said, "Return to the second level and I will send a message to the pipe station there."

"Right," and he was gone.

Father saw Vincent pass, but thought he was only prowling again, unaware there was a threat of danger to Catherine if the intruder was still in the tunnels.

* * *

Patrick was near to tears, hungry, lost and frightened. *How did I get into such a mess? Where are the reasons for me being hunted like this? I tell the truth and end up being punished for somebody else's wrong doing!*

He walked back the length of the tunnel again to the place near the ladder. Somehow he didn't fancy getting lost down here, wherever he was. *That lady lives up there somewhere, and I have a feeling if I find her, she could help, but where and how do I do that?*

His mind was spinning and he felt sick. Looking at the gun in his hand he thought how he hated the thing, or any weapon, but here and now, it gave him a sort of false security, a bargaining point and he had to hold onto it, even if it was empty.

Worn out, he fell back against the tunnel wall and slid down until he was on his haunches and his head dropped between his knees.

Stop and think, he told himself, work out where it started to go wrong. Lifting his head back against the wall, he closed his eyes and stretched his legs out in front of him. *It's all happened so fast!* He let out a long breath and a tear ran down his face, as he thought of his sister. He wouldn't even be in this country if it hadn't been for her. Since their parents died in the car crash, they had become very close and confided in each other all the time. She had been older than him by three years and he looked up to her, depended on her in so many things.

When she left Sydney and came to the States as a model, he had been upset, but she made him stay behind and finish his training before he could follow her out.

He bit his lower lip, as the tears began to flow. The next time he had seen her was in the morgue! An overdose they said; lots of people died this way, they said! Only, he had her letters and he knew she didn't take drugs! That's when his troubles had begun. *I should have got help then instead of going it alone, I should have known then I couldn't do it on my own!*

He sighed and nipped his eyes, rubbing the arm of his sleeve over his face to take away the tears and frustration. *Dear God, help me!*

Sleep crept over him and he went sound to the world, for what seemed forever, but the damp and uncomfortable way he lay soon woke him and brought him back to the reality of his situation. He ran his hand through his blond hair, thinking how much pride he took in his looks and dress, yet here he was, in need of a shower and clean clothes - not to mention food.

His mind wandered back to his sister's letters, and the club he got the bar job at - where he thought he could find out who had killed her. He was there, working at last three months before he realised what was going on. Drugs were rife, going backwards and forwards from one dealer to another, but so well done you could never tell by just going to the place. She had been right!

The girls were the key; failed models being used as escorts, but for drugs, not sex, as it was made to look like, and it had been his sister, Penny's friendship with one of these girls that had made her aware of what was going on. She turned to a friend who had a police connection for his help, only to end up dead.

So, Patrick was aware that there were some members of the club who were not to be tampered with, but which ones? Sitting up now, he realised it had been the man Penny asked for help; that was the one behind these murders. It fitted! He rose from the ground and started pacing again. *Why didn't I see it before! Everet, Chad Everet. He must be behind this somehow! God, how stupid! When I had been asking questions, he wanted me to think there was a police connection when in fact, he was setting me up as a target and decoy.*

He didn't know I was Penny's brother, ex-boyfriend he was told, so probably thought I wasn't a great danger to him. Damn it! My mind was so busy worrying about who killed her, I wasn't taking things in properly. You idiot! He shouted to himself, furious he had been so blind.

The packet of powder they found on me was all a set up, even the police raid. They homed in on me like a magnet! He hit the wall with his fist in sheer anger at himself.

After getting away from the police he had gone to the chemist shop he had overheard someone mention on the phone in Everet's office. He had thought there was a connection, but fear had taken over when he got there and that patrol car passing put the wind up him, and he had run without thinking - again!

For a mature adult I've been a bloody fool! Everet and his colleagues manipulated me just how they wanted and now no one is going to believe me. lie looked at the gun with contempt. It looks like I'm going to have no choice as to what way to go now.

Sighing, he closed his eyes as he made plans to revenge Penny's death. Suddenly, his eyes flew open as he heard a noise coming from the ladder he had come down to get here. Clutching the gun he started to sweat and he could hear his heart pounding inside like a hammer. He waited, lifting the gun slowly upwards, not knowing what was going to come around the corner ...

Vincent watched the young man for some time, and realised how unhappy he was. His emotions were running high and his feeling of aloneness reached out to Vincent like a cry for help.

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He didn't think this was a wild and dangerous person, but he was obviously disturbed deeply, and hiding from something or someone. He needed help, but how could he approach such a distressed person, and one with a gun!

Vincent was suddenly taken from these thoughts. "Catherine!" She was coming, he felt her near and knew she would be down the ladder looking for him.

He watched the young man again. *I'll have to wait here, he decided, at least until Catherine arrives,* and turning to the entrance where she would come, he saw the hand with the gun rise upwards, at the ready.

Vincent concentrated his whole being on Catherine in the hope she would know he was there and ready to help her. Yes! He must wait a little longer.

Catherine stopped at the basement entrance to make sure she was alone, before going down the ladder. She could feel Vincent near and her heart skipped at the thought of him, and being with him.

As she climbed down she could feel his closeness, yet he wasn't here to help her. *That's strange*, she thought, then shrugged her shoulders, letting the bag with the clothing in drop to the ground. She held the other as she descended. Reaching the bottom, Vincent's nearness was even stronger, but there was no sign of him! Sighing, she bent to pick up the bag, then all of a sudden, a coldness fell over her and raising her head she found herself looking straight into the barrel of a hand gun.

A fear washed over her at the sight, but it faded quickly as she realised why she couldn't see Vincent, and instantly knew he was here, waiting.

Slowly, recognition from both the youth and Cathy relaxed the tension slightly, as he spoke.

"Don't make any sudden moves, please," and the gun shook a little from side to side. He was uncomfortable and surprised at seeing this lady here. "You looking for me?" His voice wasn't frightening, or demanding.

"No - I - " Cathy was having trouble finding the right words to explain. "I was in the basement leaving some things, when I thought I heard sounds down here and I was curious." *God, that sounds pathetic!* she thought to herself, *but he's not in such a good state, so may be it'll pass.* "What are you doing here?" She threw the ball back into his court. "No one comes here, it's dangerous and you could get lost."

"Yeah! Well, we both know why I'm here, don't we!" His tired face shone with sweat in the pale light.

Catherine quickly regained herself and could feel Vincent close, watching them, knowing she was in control and in no immediate danger.

She knew she had to get all his attention and, with luck, his trust, before she was going to be any help to either of them.

"What's your name?" Her voice was gentle and she could only hope he would unwind and tell her what she wanted to know.

"Who wants to know?" He was nervous but not aggressive and knew that this lady, who he had followed earlier, was somehow his lifeline. He felt it when he looked back at her, after knocking her over, as he ran away from the chemists.

"My name is Catherine, Catherine Chandler and I work at the DA's office." She paused long enough for him to take it in. "I would like to help you if I can, but to do that, you must trust me."

Slowly, the gun lowered and Catherine let out the breath she had been holding. Relaxing a little, she still stayed where she stood, as he moved slightly to lean against the tunnel wall. Lowering his eyes for a second, he glanced at the gun, then he lifted them to meet her cool, calm unmoving stare.

He took in a long deep breath. "My name is Pat, well, Patrick Collins to be exact, and I have only been in the States four months." Leaning his head against the wall he told her his story; the whole story.

When he had finished, he had tears running down his face with the sheer effort and all the inside hurt. Catherine had stood and listened to his story, never interrupting, her mind calculating, and trying to associate places with this young man's plight.

She also knew that Vincent had heard and would before long make some kind of move. "Patrick," Catherine spoke quietly so as not to alarm him in any way. "Do you still have those letters from your sister?"

He nodded his head. "I posted them to myself when there was so much activity in and around the bar, and the more I thought I was finding out, the more frightened I became."

"Where did you post them to?" She was gradually moving closer to him.

"The apartment I shared with one of the other bar staff." He stood thinking for a moment then went on. "He changed jobs just before all this started, so I don't think he's involved or at risk."

"Will he keep your mail?"

"Yes," he nodded. "Yes, I'm sure he will."

"Good." Sighing, Catherine stood directly in front of him now. "If I am to help you, you must help me."

He only nodded again as exhaustion was taking its toll.

"I must get hold of your mail and confirm the things you have so far told me." She clasped her hands together in front of her, lifted them to her face and rubbed them down her nose and mouth as she made her decision. "Also, I am going to introduce you to someone; someone very special to me and many others, and he will help look after you until I get enough evidence to take your case to the authorities."

He was watching her very closely, then slowly pulling himself up to his full height, Patrick spoke very quietly.

"I'm sorry about knocking you over the way I did, but I was running away like a scared animal and had no thought of anything or anyone else." He lifted his hands towards her in a pleading gesture. "But when I turned and looked back at you, I felt, I don't know how, but felt you could help me!" He shrugged and smiled.

Returning the smile she placed a hand on his arm, the other one she opened out for him to hand over his gun. Once she had that safe, she let out another silent breath, only this time she had been holding it much longer than she thought.

Next, she motioned Patrick to wait where he was as she turned and went around the corner of the tunnel.

Patrick could hear sounds and knew there was someone else there.

* * *

Vincent watched Catherine as she looked up at the gun pointed at her, and clenched his fists as he controlled the growing rumbling sounds that threatened to emerge from deep within him.

His eyes shot a look at the blond headed youth holding the gun and knew he was scared. Slowly though, as he watched them, they both appeared to relax slightly and some sort of recognition between them flowed through Vincent and he felt more at ease.

Catherine didn't take long to get control and he allowed himself a smile as his love went out to her. She let him know she was aware of his presence by the slightest of glances to the 'viewing wall' and allowing her inner being to send her love to him.

Vincent listened as the youth - Patrick - told his tale and realised that his first judgement had been right. They must help if they could. He waited until it was time for him to move and once Catherine had the gun safe, Vincent went to meet her.

His heart jumped a beat as she turned the corner to be with him, and they held each other close.

As Catherine lifted her head to speak, he greeted her with a tender, but loving kiss, melting her within his arms.

"Vincent, oh Vincent," she sighed into his chest.

"I know, Catherine. We have once more to share our time together." He frowned. "But we must help him!" lie tilted his head and bent slightly towards her.

He lifted her hand and traced his face, down his nose to his lips. Reaching up on tip-toes she kissed him before she spoke.

"Yes. I feel we can, but will Father and the others allow him to stay Below?"

They parted and held hands. "Once Father hears his story, I'm sure he will not object to his staying, until you can help him Above."

Smiling at each other, they returned to the spot where she had left Patrick.

Catherine went first and Patrick watched her, looking for the body to go with the other voice he had heard.

"Patrick," she came towards him. "The person you are about to meet is, as I said, very special. He is also slightly unusual, but don't be afraid of him." She took his arm and led him to Vincent. "He is here to help you."

At first, Patrick froze to the spot, unable to speak or move; just stare. Vincent, being used to this waited a few moments before making any kind of movement.

"Patrick," Catherine's voice was low and had a soothing affect. "This is Vincent!"

Stretching out his hand, Vincent's soft tones had their usual response when he spoke. "Patrick, I hope we can help you prove your innocence, but until then, you must come with me to a safe place."

"How did you - ?" He looked from Vincent to Catherine, who was smiling a knowing smile. He also noticed how her eyes shone and took on a faraway expression when looking at this extraordinary man standing in front of him. Confused, but somehow sure of these people and their promise of help, he shook Vincent's hand. "Thank you. I would be glad of some safe place right now."

Vincent nodded and with Catherine's bags now in his grasp, said, "We must go now. Please follow us," and he moved forward.

"Before we do go, Patrick," Catherine turned slightly so as to look directly at him. "You must promise me that this place and these people must never be talked about." She put a hand on his arm as if to stress the point she was making. "No one must know you were here, or the lives and safety of this world will be endangered and that must never happen! Do you understand?"

Patrick had no idea what she was on about, but to promise these people silence was a small price to pay for what they planned to do for him.

"Miss Chandler, Vincent," he was standing just a few feet in front of them. "I promise you, no one will ever know from me, about this place you are taking me to." He sighed. "I am not perfect, but I am also not one to tell lies and when I promise you this, please believe it to be true."

Vincent turned and led them through the maze of tunnels, his thoughts on Patrick. He spoke like somebody older than his years. *I must ask his age, he thought, and what it was he planned to be, when his sister had been so intent on him finishing his exams; but later when he is settled in, and has met Father.*

Slowly, a broad smile covered his face and stopping, he turned towards Catherine, who felt a surge of excitement in Vincent, as he spoke softly to her.

"You can stay in my chamber, and Patrick will have the guest one for now."

Catherine returned the knowing smile and had to lower her head from his gaze as they both knew there were other chambers available for use that would have done Patrick, but it seemed this was an opportunity not to be missed.

Lifting her eyes again, she just nodded. "That's fine, Vincent."

None of these exchanged glances were lost on Patrick. He had to admit to see such love made him feel light-hearted again - almost human.

"Agh." Catherine cleared her throat. "Patrick, we are nearly at Father's chamber, so be prepared for more questions."

"Father?" He looked from one to the other.

"Yes." Vincent spoke, his velvet tones relaxing Patrick even more. "He is the figurehead of our community and looked up to by everyone."

"He is also Vincent's father, and a very good doctor." Catherine's pride came through in this last statement, and was not missed by either men.

They turned the next corner and Patrick's mouth dropped open in amazement. He took in the size and sheer beauty of this chamber, before his eyes focused on an elderly man, sitting behind a huge antique desk. He raised his head as they entered, removed his glasses and leaned back into the large chair he looked so much a part of.

"Vincent!"

"Father, did you get my message from Bruce?" Putting down Catherine's things, Vincent went to join him. "I couldn't explain everything on the pipes, but you have the main reasons for me bringing Patrick here."

Before he could answer, Catherine was at his side, planting a kiss on his cheek. "It's good to see you, Father. It's been too long, this time."

"Catherine." He squeezed her hand and smiled warmly at her. "It's always good to see you, but please don't leave it so long next time, he has been driving me mad!" And he nodded towards Vincent.

Laughing quietly together, Catherine knew she had succeeded in breaking the atmosphere, and with her hand, motioned Patrick to join them.

Patrick had stood quietly and watched the events going on around him.

This strange place was a marvel and felt so good, he was sure a person could be at peace here without even trying.

Vincent's father was not what he had expected, but then, nothing that had happened to him in the last few hours was what he would have expected!

He sighed to himself and waited until the reunion between Catherine and Father was over, and as she motioned him down the small steps, Vincent joined him.

Here we go, he thought, but not unpleasantly, and with a good deal of hope.

Father sat playing with his glasses, and listened to Patrick's tale. When he had finished, Father rose, reached for his walking stick and circled the chamber before standing in front of this tired looking young man.

"Tell me, Patrick, how old are you?"

"I'm twenty-six, believe it or not." He shook his head. "Both my sister and I have always had problems making people understand we are older than we look!"

"And your studies, the training you were doing that your sister was so keen for you to complete?" Father now sat down.

"I was training to become a doctor. My mother was a nurse and my father was a vet." He smiled at the thought of them. "I guess it was in the blood."

Father raised his eyebrows at this, and renewed his interest. "And how did you do in your exams?"

"I passed." This was said with little interest.

Father frowned; *he must rekindle this boy's interest eventually*, he thought. "Well now." Father turned to Vincent and Catherine. "Has Patrick been told about the need for secrecy, and the fact that no one Above should know about us?"

"Yes." Vincent came and put his hand on Father's shoulder. "He is more than willing to keep our secret." He bent forward. "I feel that he is in need of a shower and a good days rest, Father."

"Of course. Yes, we must let him recover before he has to face more questions." He looked him straight in the eye. "You are welcome to shelter here, and be safe until Catherine can do something. But it's the weekend and a couple of days before anything can be accomplished." He let out a long breath. "So have a good rest and something to eat, before we get down to the task of getting your name cleared."

Patrick got up from his chair, very tired, and again near tears - only this time, they were tears of joy. "I can't thank you enough, for what you are doing for me, and I will help as much as I can." He looked around. "But thanks from both myself and my sister."

"Come," Vincent took his arm. "I will show you the guest chamber."

Father swiveled around to look at Catherine who, aware of what his reaction would be, was at the top of the steps with her bags in hand.

"I'll see you in your chamber, Vincent." She turned to Father. "I'll join you for tea this evening, if that's all right." She had a few words with Patrick and was gone.

Father lowered his head, and reaching for his glasses, just couldn't stop the smile that crept across his bearded face.

* * *

Catherine was so pleased to be alone and in Vincent's chamber at last! What a morning! It seemed like days since she got up, and here it was, only one o'clock in the afternoon.

Taking the food through to the storage alcove, she then placed her own things in the 'free' drawer in Vincent's large chest. He always kept it clear for her and her things since the first day he had carried her there. She smiled at the memories and absent-mindedly rubbed her hands over the chest, shutting her eyes as the deep feelings flooded through her.

"Catherine, are you all right?" Vincent had come in without her being aware, she was so deep in her dreams.

"I am now," and she went to his outstretched arms and cuddled into the safe, secure chest that was her salvation on many an occasion. "Vincent?" She raised her head to look into his beautiful eyes. "I love you."

He pulled her to him again, squeezing her so tight she gasped for breath, then pulling her from him, just a little, he bent his head and kissed her with all the love he possessed, leaving no need for words.

Slowly, and not a little hesitantly, they parted and held hands as they looked at each other.

"Vincent, I'm sorry about Patrick," she sighed. "I know this weekend was to have been as special to you as it was to me."

"Oh Catherine," he smiled at her. "We still have our weekend, and perhaps - " a twinkle came into his eyes, " - Patrick's arrival will be to our advantage."

They both knew his meaning and allowed each other to laugh in a new and relaxed way. Catherine returned to her task of storing her things as Vincent made tea. Joining him amongst the cushions on the floor, she poured the brew and could see he was deep in thought.

"Vincent," her soft tone brought him from his day dream. "Are you thinking about Patrick?"

He took his cup. "No, Father."

"Father? Why?" She frowned slightly.

"He paid me an early visit this morning and surprised me with his unusual reaction to your visit this weekend!"

"Surprised you? How?" She sipped her tea as Vincent retraced the conversation he had that morning. "I don't believe it!" And she couldn't.

"It's true." Vincent shifted the cups and placed an arm around Catherine's shoulder.

"That's why he never commented on the chamber arrangements," she whispered, very near Vincent's ear.

"Hmmn." He pulled her close.

Catherine turned and lifted herself upwards to reach her arms around his neck, and still with whispered tones asked, "Is his talk with you the reason you are so relaxed and at ease now?" She lowered her head to one side, as he so often did.

He sighed and kissed her nose. "Yes, I think it is. His blessing is very important to me - to us."

She nodded and slowly bent forward to be lost in his embrace and kisses that had been only dreams until now. Breathless and happy they leaned against the bed with their legs stretched out in front of them, mixed with the assorted cushions.

"Catherine, tonight, here, are you sure?" Vincent bent to look at her. After the beautiful and loving discoveries they had made that afternoon, with such relaxed emotions, it would only be natural for them to share the night.

"Yes Vincent, never more sure," and she buried herself in his chest, where the sound of a long, contented sigh slowly emerged.

They read to each other, talked about his work in the tunnels, her plans for Patrick, and finally back to Father.

"Speaking of which ... " Catherine rose from the floor. "I did promise to have tea with him."

"Good." Vincent seemed pleased. "You go to Father while I plan dinner."

"You're not coming?"

"He enjoys your talks, Catherine. More so when I'm not there to distract you - so he says."

"Oh you!" And giving him a friendly push, she blew him a kiss from the doorway.

Father was waiting for Catherine - the person who was as much a daughter to him now as Vincent was his son. He could have lost her and her love for them many times in the earlier years, but thankfully what she and Vincent shared outweighed his logic and protective manner.

"Father."

"Come in, come in." He beamed at her and waited at the desk, where tea and cakes were ready. She kissed his cheek and sat opposite him.

"It's good you're here, Catherine, we missed you!"

"I missed being here," and she squeezed his hand.

Father handed her a cup. "Where's Vincent?"

"He says he's going to get dinner ready for us." She smiled and leaned forward. "Besides which I think he wanted us to be alone."

"Yes, well, I must agree we do cover a wider range of subjects when he's not here," and he raised his eyebrows as he looked over the rim of his half-glasses, sitting a little squint on the end of his nose. They laughed together and began an hour's enjoyable, relaxed tea before Vincent joined them.

Cathy turned to watch him enter, and Father noticed she had done this before he was even aware Vincent was coming. *They are remarkable, these two!*

Vincent came over to the desk and gave Catherine a fleeting kiss on her brow before sitting beside her and taking her hand.

"Well, you two, have you put the world to rights yet?" he smiled broadly at Father.

"Vincent," he replied, taking off his glasses, "we have had an extremely entertaining time, thank you!"

Catherine squeezed his hand. "How did you get on, preparing dinner?" With a glint in her eye she continued, "Or will we be joining the others?"

"As you wish, but dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes." He turned his attention to Father. "How about some wine for our meal?"

"Yes, an excellent idea." He rose from his chair and handed Vincent a key. "You choose."

"But I brought some," Catherine looked at him with a frown. "Didn't I?"

Vincent came back to her and, lifting her hands, kissed them tenderly. "Yes, you did, but Father has an assortment for the special times," he smiled at her warmly and glanced at the older man, watching them. "And this seems to be a special time."

Catherine rose and went back to the chamber, giving Father a little time alone before they ate. She was so happy, here was another step in their remarkable life. Things were happening and it felt so good!

Father sat at the big chair by the fire and let out a long contented sigh.

"Ah, that was most enjoyable, a great combination from both worlds," and he raised his glass of wine to Catherine and Vincent, who were sitting on the couch.

Catherine got up and cleared away the dinner things, motioning to Vincent to stay and talk to Father when he offered to help. She made tea and by the time it was brewed she had finished and joined them by the fire.

Half an hour later, Vincent walked Father to his chamber. "Thank you for a lovely evening," he sighed. "It makes me very happy to see you and Cathy together, like a family."

"Yes, we are, all of us," and Vincent hugged him. "Thank you Father, for everything."

"Oh - I ah - looked in on Patrick before and he was sound asleep, but I think I'll just see if he's all right." He nodded. "Good night, Vincent."

"Good night, Father." He turned to his chamber and a night of dreams fulfilled. Catherine was curled up on the floor in front of the fire when he came back, and in the reflected light she was so beautiful, he just stood for a moment to take it all in.

"Vincent," she spoke his name as she held out her hand for him to join her.

"It's getting late," was all he could say.

She smiled at him over her glass as he lowered himself down beside her. He was nervous and shy, but so full of love it didn't make any difference to them as they kissed each other.

"I love you so, Vincent." Catherine's own voice was husky and barely a whisper.

"Oh Catherine, Catherine," and he held her close before lifting her in one quick movement, to place her gently on their bed. "I love you, but have no words to express how much."

"Sshhh." Her arms snaked around his neck. "You can show me."

Vincent never hesitated and they shared their night to remember in the very place that Catherine's new life had begun.

Catherine turned to discover she was alone in the large beautiful bed. *God! What a night!* she thought. *Even my dreams didn't prepare me for that kind of loving,* and she shivered with pleasure at the thought.

"Are you cold, Catherine?" Vincent came over with some tea, bending first to kiss her and caress her face with his tender touch.

"No, I'm far from cold!" She smiled at him. "I was only thinking of last night."

He beamed an unusual smile at her, a cross between a wicked boy and satisfied lover, she decided.

"And?"

"Mmm, I'm speechless, but oh! So very happy," and she snuggled into his soft white jumper.

He held her close for a while, then getting up from the bed, said, "Patrick woke early this morning and is much more himself, it seems." He handed her, her robe. "He told me his parents were English but had moved to Australia some twenty years ago."

"Is that why he hasn't got the twang to his voice, do you think?" Cathy sat up on her knees as she pulled the tie-wrap around her waist.

"Probably. He said they tried to stay as traditional as they could." He shook his head. "It's sad, he's lost all his family within a year. It seems hardly fair for the one person that's left."

Catherine leaned towards him, gently turned his face to hers, kissed him and brushed the hair from the side of his face, with the back of her hand.

"We can help him, Vincent. I know it," she sat back on the bed. "But not overnight. We will do it though, believe me."

"I do, Catherine. But we are the only friends he has now and I think he's worried we may not succeed."

"We will." She got up and collected her towel for a shower. "We will." She squeezed his hand as she went to freshen up.

Nodding to himself, Vincent knew that she was right. She must have been thinking about it already for her to be so sure. He sighed, hoping there was no danger involved. They had steered clear of violence for a long time now and he wasn't wanting his Catherine in any more danger. More so now they had a real future in front of them.

Reluctantly, he returned to Father and Patrick in the main chamber. Vincent smiled as he came near and could hear Father talking about possibilities and a future in medicine for Patrick - another challenge for him it seemed!

"Ah, Vincent," Father turned to him and put the book and his glasses, that had been in his hand on the desk "Is Catherine awake yet?"

"She will join us shortly," and he sat down beside him at the desk.

"Vincent," Patrick cleared his throat a little. "Father has been getting onto me about my medicine and staying around here if I can get cleared." He paused and looked up at him. "Would you object to my staying here, I mean, as a permanent fixture?"

"No." He leaned towards him. "And if, for some remote reason, we do not get the evidence required, I am sure you would be more than welcome to join our family." Vincent had tried to use the right words in hope he would make him feel a part of them - of something.

"Thank you, I ... Thank you."

"Catherine," Father rose to greet her. She was beautiful and glowing. "Good morning, my dear. You slept well?"

Catherine could see the twinkle in his eyes, and glancing at Vincent, who had the decency to lower his head slightly, grinned back.

"Yes Father, best night I've ever had," and before any more tongue-in-cheek could pass between them, carried on with, "Good morning, Patrick, you look much better today."

"Thanks, I'm one hundred per cent better." He smiled back at her, realising the fun she was having with Father.

"Well now," she sat next to Vincent who reached for her hand. "How about we go over a few things now, and I'll let you in on the way I hope to approach this when I get back to work tomorrow?"

"Sounds good to me," and he pulled his chair into the desk.

* * *

All too soon it was Sunday evening and Catherine and Vincent were alone for the first time.

After the conference over tactics and methods to help Patrick, they had taken him on a tour of the tunnels and introduced him to as many people as possible. They learned much more about him and he about them, but eventually they left him back with Father.

"You are very quiet, Catherine." He put his arm around her shoulders. "Is there something troubling you?"

"Not really; just the thought of leaving you." She sighed and whispered, "It's been such a special weekend."

He turned her around to him and held her face in his hands. "Don't go, stay until the morning."

"All right, Vincent, I'll stay, but I'll have to leave early to get ready for work." They clung to each other and felt the surge of love flowing between their inner beings.

* * *

"Catherine, Catherine," he whispered with a little urgency, shaking her gently. "It's time for you to get up," and he bent down to kiss her.

"Vincent, what time is it?" She stretched and returned his kiss. "Oh no! Not already!" She buried her face in the pillows like a spoiled child. She couldn't remember the last time she had not wanted to go to work.

"Catherine!" Vincent scolded her, smiling to himself, and gave her a slap on the bottom.

"Ouch!" She turned and lifted her hand to him, but he caught it and in one move gave her a fireman's lift out of the bed.

"Hush! You'll wake the whole tunnel!"

She was still kicking as he lowered her to the ground, and laughed at each other. They joined heads, nose-to-nose, forehead-to-forehead and tried to be quiet.

"Oh Vincent, it's been wonderful!"

He held her tight to him. "Catherine, we have made some beautiful discoveries this weekend." He paused for breath. "And now, more than ever I must stress you take great care Above." He released his hold on her and they just stood for a moment.

"I'll be careful, I promise." Then reluctantly, she moved to get dressed and collect her things together.

They walked hand in hand until they got to the basement entrance.

"Until tonight," he smiled, as he brushed the hair from her face. Even at this early hour she was beautiful.

"You'll come Above?" She felt suddenly tired and in need of a shower.

"Yes."

They kissed once more and parted.

* * *

The next week was hectic; not only did she have the day-to-day work of the office, but trying to work on Patrick's case without Joe knowing was a strain.

She had managed to go to Patrick's flat and collect the mail, along with some clothing and one or two other items that belonged to him.

With the letters and the other information she and Rita had collected, she decided to go to Joe and convince him of her belief in Patrick's innocence.

"Cathy," Joe was pacing. "I'm not going to ask where or how you came across this information," he waved the letters at her. "But if you think you can follow this through and get me something more concrete to use, so we can coordinate with the boys downtown, then it's on." He shook his head. "You know, Radcliffe, for every one of these places we shut down, two more spring up." He sighed. "It's the ones caught in between that suffer."

"Joe, there's more at stake here than just Patrick and his sister's death." She threw her arms out in front of her. "It's there in the letters, at least three girls died and God knows how many others have been got rid of because they found out too much!"

She sat down in her swivel chair and swung around to face him.

"Joe, we need to get on with this now. I want full time on it ... please."

He rubbed his brow and then his chin. "Okay, Radcliffe, okay!" He lifted her phone and as he dialed out, turned to her. "We'll get Greg Hughes in on this and see what we can arrange." He paused to listen. "Yeah! Get me Greg Hughes, it's Joe Maxwell." He tapped the desk impatiently. "When? Oh, okay. Get him to call be back - thanks." He replaced the phone. "Okay Cathy," he moved to the door. "Drop everything and let's concentrate on this, for now."

"Great Joe, thanks."

"Hey - if you have a hunch, one thing I've learned; go with it, kiddo!" He smiled and shut the door behind him.

Cathy stirred into action and had everything organised and running by the time she left the office. Greg had phoned back and they were getting someone working inside the club that night. So, by the time she met Vincent, he could see she was pleased and happy with the progress report.

They hadn't seen each other since late Monday and it was a relief to spend some time in each other's company.

Vincent was worried. He could feel the excitement within her as she told him how things were developing, and he knew there was a great deal of danger as well.

"Catherine, you must be careful." He leaned his head back. "There is such a risk here, with this case."

"Vincent." She put her arms around his neck and they kissed. "I've already promised you I'll take care, and I will."

"I could not survive without you, Catherine! You die, I die!" and he buried his head in her hair and on her shoulder.

"Oh Vincent, it won't come to that, believe me!" and she held him closer.

* * *

Patrick was far from idle as he watched Catherine's progress to clear him.

Father was very insistent that he continue working on his medical papers and he had even had his friend, Dr Peter Alcott, come and meet him. In fact, he had come Below and spent many hours with Patrick, helping him with papers and finding out what exams he would need to pass to practice in the States.

With Catherine's help and Peter's, they had found a building on the other side of the park, where he could have an office and do up the back as an apartment for him to live. If he passed the exams he hoped to sit - or not - he was going to stay. Between Vincent, Father, Catherine and everyone Below, he had never felt so much a part of anything before and now he wanted to help people, too.

Funny, he thought, looking around this chamber - he now had his own, even to the desk he sat at - taking up medicine had been to please his parents and his heart had never been in it, Yet here, with Father and the others, he truly felt he could do some good.

He sighed and rubbed his eyes. Glancing at his watch he noticed he had been studying for five hours solid. *God! How did I do that?* He shook his head. *This place is amazing!* Even in Sydney he never worked this hard, he never felt the need.

Then his thoughts wandered to Mouse and more deeply to Jamie. He got on well with Mouse; he never failed to surprise him with the brain power that lay hidden inside such a tender soul. But Jamie, oh! Yes! She was something special and had stirred his insides more than he would have liked. They had spent a lot of time in each other's company and he knew she was beginning to soften towards him. She was even enthusiastic about the hopes he had to open his day rooms and she went with him when he went to view them.

He had felt her excitement and when he had asked if she would be his secretary, she had flung her arms around him and kissed him without thinking. The look that passed between them was one of awkward, mixed emotions, with neither wanting to make the first move or to break the closeness they had created.

Jamie had been a little distant since then, but still bright and cheerful when they met -though never alone.

Father, although he didn't give the impression of a man of the world, had guessed there was something going on between these two young people.

"Patrick, may I come in?"

"Oh, Father! I'm sorry, I was day-dreaming. Please, come join me," and he got up to give him his only chair.

"Well, you're at the books again, I see!" He smiled warmly at him. "You know I'm very proud of the way you are pushing for these exams. I have great hopes for you my boy, I somehow feel your destiny is linked with us and I - we - are all behind you in this."

Nodding his head, he patted the older man's shoulder. "It's not just for me, Father, you have all given me a reason for going on and I know Penny would be proud too."

"Yes, I'm sure she would." He rose to leave, but turned at the doorway. "It's none of my business, but I think you and Jamie should have a talk."

"Why do you say that?" He flushed slightly.

"Well, she seems to be a little disorientated these days. She gave me the same message three times in two days!" His voice was low but a little teasing in its tone, as he looked at him over the top of his glasses.

"I'm very - well, I have these feelings - "

"Patrick! There is a Japanese proverb that says 'The day of decision is the day to act upon it'. Think about it," and smiling, he left the young man a little embarrassed, but grateful.

Patrick couldn't do any more and ended up going to bed early, only to find he couldn't sleep. Jamie, his exams, the hopes he had, all played havoc with his mind and he ended up more awake than ever.

He was doodling on his pad when he heard the footsteps and looking up he saw her. He got up so fast, his chair went flying and he nearly followed.

"Jamie!" He thought he had shouted the word, but in fact she had hardly heard him, he was so husky.

"Can I - ?" and she spoke with her hand.

"You bet; come in." He was getting some balance back.

Head slightly bowed, she came and stood directly in front of him. "I'm sorry - I have been a bit unfair to you recently."

It was an effort, but he came to her and took her hands in his. "No, it's me who should be saying sorry. I - I'm not too good at emotional feelings, I'm afraid." He attempted a smile but went on in case she would interrupt and break the flow. "We have spent a lot of time together these last few weeks and my feelings for you are more than just friendly." He sighed and shut his eyes. "Jamie," he whispered her name as he lowered his gaze to her, "I'm falling in love with you." *That's it, I've done it! Oh God! It's all going to fall apart.*

He was surprised when he felt her pull her hand from his and lift it to his face.

"Patrick," she was hardly able to speak and her eyes were showing signs of tears. "I have strong feelings for you too and I'm a little confused. I need some time, some space."

Their eyes locked onto each other, until finally Patrick bent and gave her a tender kiss that was the lightest of touches. This ended in them hugging and holding on to each other, neither finding the right words, so not saying anything.

After what seemed like forever, just standing there, they slowly parted and smiled at each other.

"I think we'll just take this one day at a time," Patrick managed at last and brushed a strand of hair from her cheek.

"That seems like the sensible thing to do, but I ... " she trailed off and dropped her head.

Patrick lifted it back with his hand under her chin and kissed her again, this time stronger, longer and more emotional.

"I love you and that includes respect, so I won't do anything that's not to your approval, okay?"

She nodded, smiled and fell against him to give him a hug.

One day at a time, yes, it was going to be a special time from now on and she closed her eyes as he tightened his grip.

* * *

Catherine swiveled in her chair as she read over the papers again, then glancing at the window, she shut her eyes and thought of Vincent. His worry and concern ran deep and so far she had been able to keep out of the main traffic, but the case was a few weeks old now, and developing well. She knew before long her involvement would have to be more intense and she sighed as a frown creased her brow.

A tapping on her door made her snap back to the present and she swiveled around to see who was coming in.

"Tony?"

"Hi, Miss Chandler," he was nervous and his face was swollen and bruised.

"Tony, what happened to you?" She went around the desk to bring him inside and shut the door, motioning through the glass for two cups of coffee to be brought in. "Who did this?"

He sat and gave her a weak smile. "It's much better now, you should have seen me on Tuesday!" He held his mouth, as it still hurt on one side.

"What can you tell me?" She rose from her perch on the end of her desk, to collect the two cups coming through the door. "Thanks," and shut it with her foot. Handing one to Tony, she waited until he was ready.

"Do you remember when you came into the market a few weeks back and that guy tried to hold up the drug store?"

Catherine nodded. "Uh-huh."

"Well, for some reason some goons from the Ivory Club downtown, thought I knew where this blond guy went and didn't believe me when I said I had no idea!"

"But why you, Tony?" She came to sit on her desk and looked directly at him. "Did you see something, or hear something?"

"Well, not that I thought to be important at the time, but may be it was!" He sighed, then snorted. "I still wouldn't have told them anything even if I knew different!" He took a sip from his coffee and cringed a little as the heat hit a tender spot. "Anyway, Miss Chandler, that's why I'm here."

"Okay, Tony." She nodded to herself as she returned to her seat and lifted her pad and pencil. "Let's see what you've got." Excitement was growing inside her as another link was forming in this chain of events.

"I was working out the back in the store room when you got knocked over, and it was down the back alley next to me, he ran." He took another sip of coffee. "I didn't notice him at first, but he had stopped for breath beside the rubbish skip and I called out to him to see if he was okay." He paused for breath and placed his cup on the floor. "He looked rough, but he gave me a smile and said he was okay. Then he asked me where the good-looking lady that just left the shop stayed. I asked why and he said he had knocked you over and ran off without saying sorry and he wanted to apologise." He shrugged his shoulders. "I had no reason to doubt him so I told him which apartment block you stayed in." He sighed. "I'm sorry, Miss Chandler, I didn't know he had tried to rob the drug store."

"Tony, is there anything else?" she frowned. "That's not worth a beating up over!"

"Yeah! Well, I went back inside then and did some stock taking. About half an hour later, I went back to the rear entrance with a can of coke and hunched down to drink it, so I was hidden from sight. I could hear voices but didn't take much notice to start with, but then they started to raise their tones and weren't being too pleasant either!"

"Go on," Cathy was absorbed.

"Then I recognised Mr Johnson's voice

Cathy butted in. "The chemist?"

Tony nodded then went on. "He was arguing with whoever the other voice belonged to. Anyway, I heard Johnson say something like, 'I told you not to come here' and the other voice said, 'so what, nobody knows you're connected with us or the Ivory Club, so just remember the boss isn't pleased with deliveries'. Then Johnson spoke again and told him to keep his voice down."

He got up from the chair and went to look out of the window. "It still isn't clear to me what it means, but the voices faded away after that and I got a call on my bleeper, so I had to go inside." He turned to face Catherine, who had swiveled around to follow him.

"Could they have heard your bleeper?" she leaned forward as she spoke.

Again he shrugged his shoulders. "I guess so, it's pretty loud the one I have because I need to hear it above the noise of the machines we use to shift stock."

Cathy waited until Tony went and sat back down in front of her desk.

"The ones that beat you up; how do you know they were connected to this club?" She leaned back in her chair and tapped her pencil in her hand.

"That's the easy part," he snorted. "One of them is a brother to one of the yobs I used to hang around. His name is Wilson, Wilson Jones." He leaned back to rest his head on the couch. "Maybe Leroy could help - that's Wilson's brother. I hear he's trying hard." He smiled up at her. "Since I've done so well, one or two of the gang have changed for the better."

Cathy nodded and thought for a while. "Tony, do you think they will come to you again? Or are they convinced you don't know anything?"

"No, they won't come back." He was sure about this.

"If at any time you're worried, get back to me and I'll put you and your family in the witness protection scheme."

"What's it all about, Miss Chandler? The club, that chap with the blonde hair and Mr Johnson - I don't understand."

"It's better you don't at this stage and all I can tell you is, that 'blonde chap' has been set up as a decoy for other people." She got up from her chair and smiled at Tony. "Don't worry, you'll find out soon enough! However, I will probably need you to give evidence at the trial; will you?"

He thought for a few minutes before replying. "Yeah! Sure can't do any more harm, can it?"

"Good!" Cathy's mind was working overtime, trying to decide what to do first. "Oh! Before you go, what's Leroy's address?"

"Don't you go there, Miss Chandler, you may not come out in one piece!" He looked worried.

"It won't be me, I'll put one of the agents on to it." She smiled a reassuring smile that didn't ring true, somehow!

After Tony had left, Cathy sent for Rita and they spent the afternoon gathering more facts and figures.

By late afternoon, she had Greg and Joe in her office going over everything she had so far. Joe gave her the go ahead.

"Right, Cathy, the run down as you see it."

"Okay! Patrick's sister came across this system of drugs and the models used to deliver them. She also realised there were deaths involved. I should think these girls were too taken with the drugs or, like Penny, found out too much and had to go." She sighed. "We know that Chad Everet is involved, we now have Johnson connected. What we don't know is who supplies Johnson and is there anyone above Everet?"

Joe turned. "Greg, what have you got?" He paced to the door and back to sit on Cathy's desk.

"Not a lot, but we do know that Chad is not an employee of the owner of the building. He rents the property, so we think he set the ball rolling with Johnson's boss and has now decided to play God." He sighed aloud and threw a pile of papers on Cathy's desk.

"We can go and see Leroy, Cathy, and maybe his brother, to try and get some more evidence that will help put Everet away for good." He turned to face Joe. "But we are going to have to watch Johnson twenty-four hours a day to find out who he's dealing with."

"Yeah," Joe nodded. "He's going to be an important piece in this damn puzzle." He lifted a rubber band from Cathy's desk and started twisting it back and forth between his two hands. "How many men can we put on this?" He glanced at Catherine. "Radcliffe?"

"Joe! I think we should keep a low profile here, don't you? I mean, he's going to get jumpy if he even thinks there's a tail on him!" She was standing now with one hand on her hip and the other waving the air in front of them.

"How? You tell me that, Cathy. How else?"

"We can get Rita a job in the drug store, I can do it, Joe!" She waited.

"Too dangerous." He shook his head.

"I don't think so, I know one of the girls that works there well enough to do a deal and get Rita in without any suspicions."

With that, Rita appeared at the door, arms loaded with more read outs. She dumped them on Cathy's desk, and still leaning over she looked her straight in the eye.

"Guess who owns the building the club's in?" Without even moving her position she watched Cathy's instant acknowledgment.

"Oh no!" She slumped back into her chair. "Not again, it can't be!"

"Afraid so, our Elliot's in there again!"

"Yeah, but hold on a minute," Greg joined in. "He's out of the country just now, and has been for oh, nearly nine months."

"That's right," Cathy had forgotten about him for some time now, but did remember reading in the gossip columns about him going off on a world cruise. "He's cruising with the new lady in his life; what's her name Jacqui something or other."

"You're right." Rita's brain was in overdrive. "She works for him too. Some high-powered lady, they say."

"Well, thank God he's not up to his neck in this one!" Joe turned to Catherine, then to Rita. "Has Radcliffe spoken to you about her plan?"

"Yeah, we talked about it." She held her hands in front of her, waiting.

"What do you think, Greg?" Joe was slipping on the downward.

"They have a point, Joe. This way it's only out of office hours - we'll have to keep a tab on him." He got up. "And the way things are buzzing, I don't think we'll have to wait too long."

"Have we got the warrants at the ready? I don't want any hold ups if this goes down."

"It's organized, Joe, they are here with all the other papers we will need to go in with."

Cathy watched and waited.

"Okay, okay," he let out a long sigh. "We'll do it, but no heroics, Rita - and Cathy, that includes you too!" he smiled then. "Go for it, girls."

Rita and Cathy both turned and slapped their hands. "All right!" Rita was so glad to be doing this. Cathy was the only one who knew her younger sister was recovering from an overdose.

* * *

It was late when Catherine left the office. She was exhausted but excited at the plans and progress they had made. She shivered as she left the warm lobby and was surprised to see there were snowflakes falling like cotton buds. She shrugged deeper into her coat and headed for the curb to find a cab.

"Miss Chandler! Miss Chandler!"

Catherine turned to see Tony running towards her. She went rigid. "Tony! What is it?"

"Not here," he grabbed her arm and they headed to the coffee bar two doors down. Once inside, they ordered and sat with the hot drinks in their hands.

"Tony!" She was getting annoyed now.

"I'm sorry if I worried you, but I've something you may be interested in." He had a wicked grin on his face, which was lop-sided due to the bruises.

Cathy let out a sigh, realising he was going to take his own pace.

"After I left you yesterday, I was curious so went and had a hunt around the skips outside the store." He handed her an envelope. "I found this."

Cathy took the brown envelope and looked inside, then shook the contents out onto the table. Four small packets of white powder fell in a bundle.

"God!" She replaced them before they saw daylight. "Where?"

"Outside Johnson's." He reached into his coat pocket. "This was with it," and he handed over a cigarette lighter.

She twisted it around her fingers and found there was an engraving on its side - *to Syd from Chad*. Looking up at Tony she wasn't sure what to say.

"Is this what it's about?" he pointed to the envelope.

"Yes, I'm afraid it's part of it." She sighed again and shut her eyes. "Did anyone see you pick this up? I'm serious, Tony! Anyone?"

"No. Nobody saw me."

"Are you sure!"

"I'm sure! Nobody saw me, okay?" he was a little edgy.

"I think we had better get you some protection to be on the safe side."

"No! It'll panic my folks." He relaxed a little then. "Besides, I'm safer than you think."

"Oh, Tony, please don't take any more risks," she said putting her hand on his. "We have people for that, but thanks, it's a great help."

"Do you want to know who 'Syd' is?" Again the grin was spreading wide.

"You know?" She couldn't believe it.

"I didn't think the two things were connected at first, but now I'm not so sure."

"Well?"

"Johnson's brother - they call him Syd, short for Sydney - lives in Australia. Travels over here a few times a year. His name is Peter. Well, I'd better go, I've got a date."

She hadn't heard. "Sorry?"

"Date, Friday night, I gotta go." He smiled.

"Oh! Right, thanks Tony. But promise, no more playing detective." She returned his smile as he walked backwards with his hands up high.

"I promise," then he turned and went out into the snow.

Glancing at her watch she noted there was no point in going back to the office, so she gathered the items up, put them in her bag and left for home, all the time making plans and rearranging things in her mind.

Twenty minutes later she shut her apartment door behind her and flew into Vincent's waiting arms. The fire was warm and inviting as they ate dinner, side by side on the floor in front of its friendly glow.

"Vincent, thank you for being here and all this, it's wonderful," and she kissed his cheek as she gathered up the dishes.

"Catherine, I was a little worried. Earlier I felt your fear, but it passed. Then you were so late!"

"Well, I have loads to tell you," and getting their tea, she returned to his side and relayed the events one by one.

"Will this help complete the investigation?" he gently brushed the hair from her face as she leaned back over the couch.

"Hmm, but catching this 'Syd' would be a bonus." Her eyes shut, she was speaking in a whisper. The heat from the fire and the food had made her suddenly tired.

Vincent lifted her into his arms and carried her through to the bedroom. "No more tonight." He kissed her cheek. "This is our time," and he lay beside her on the bed. Without trying, her thoughts of the day's activities flew from her as she was taken over by their love for each other. She was in no doubt that this was another night to remember and between them they created heaven on earth.

"I love you, Vincent," was all she could manage before exhaustion took over, and never heard his whispered words back.

"I know, and I you."

He lay awake going over what she had told him and realised that this could nearly be over at last, and with that hope, closed his eyes, drew her close and fell into a gentle sleep.

* * *

Catherine woke late and even with the cloudy sky, a small shaft of light shone through into her bedroom. *Oh God! I feel great!*

Vincent had stirred in the early hours and woke her, only to result in them becoming the lovers they so naturally were.

As she smiled and stretched she noticed Vincent's cloak on the back of the chair and raising herself up on her elbows she could see movement in the kitchen. Her joy of discovering him still here was like that of a child's. She sunk back into the bed for a second before throwing back the covers and heading for a shower. She was so happy. A day - a whole day - with him here! Quickly she dried her hair, put on tracksuit bottoms and a sloppy-Joe tee shirt and headed to join Vincent.

He had felt the rushing emotions that were heaving about inside her and it had made him smile - and just as happy as she was. Staying was not a hard decision, but mostly he thought being here would hold her back from going off to the office.

"Good morning." Her arms encircled his waist and she kissed his neck.

"Well, good afternoon!" He was teasing her and enjoying it. "Did you sleep well?"

"No, I did not!"

He looked surprised. "Excuse me?"

"I thought that would get your attention!" Then laughing, she put some butter on his nose.

"Sleeping was not the priority!"

"Ahh!" He rubbed his nose with a paper towel. "You have a point."

More seriously, she asked, "Vincent, your staying, it means a great deal to me, and I know some effort on your part." She reached tip, arms around his neck. "I love you so, do you know that?"

He kissed her long, tender and full of the emotions she had felt earlier. "Oh yes, I know that - without a doubt." He spoke with a bit of a husky voice when they slowly parted. "Come, brunch is ready." He held out the chair for her. "We have the whole weekend, Catherine," and planted a kiss on her head.

She watched him move about the kitchen and couldn't help the love she felt for him. He turned, sensing her inner feelings and gave her a beautiful smile with his blue eyes twinkling like stars reflected in a deep lagoon.

"Oh, Vincent!"

Bending in front of her, he went down on one knee and held her hands to his lips, kissing them one by one.

"Catherine, what we have, most people can only dream about. I never thought I could feel as any normal man must, but these last few weeks have proved me wrong. You have proved me wrong."

He looked up at her, his voice was velvet soft and only just audible. "Catherine, to share our life the way we do now can only bring us complete joy. You must not put yourself at risk any more. Not just because I ask you to, but because of what we are and all the people that need you."

She smiled down at him and held his head in her hands. "No more risks, Vincent, you have my word. Not because you ask it of me, but because I want it that way," and they kissed at length.

The kettle boiled, the microwave beeped and the toast burnt all at the same time. Together they quietly laughed, as they tried to rescue the efforts Vincent had made on brunch.

The rest of the afternoon was heaven. They talked about everything; the past, the future, hopes and dreams, life Above, Below and how they could survive through everyday life.

It was snowing again by supper time and as Vincent saw to the fire, Cathy made a light meal and they ate by candlelight.

They had just settled down for the night to watch a film on the video when the phone rang. Vincent held Cathy back to let the answerphone take the message, he didn't want her going off on business tonight.

"Radcliffe, it's me, Joe. Are you in or is this damn machine for real?"

She looked at Vincent with an appealing look and he nodded, knowing he could never stop her from doing what she wanted anyway.

"Hi, Joe, what's up?"

"Thought so, you got someone in?" He sounded a bit distant and perhaps tired, he had probably been at work.

"I have and unless this is important, Joe, it's going to have to wait until Monday!"

"Hell, I'm sorry, Cathy, I didn't mean to sound that way, but it's pretty important."

She could hear papers being thumbed through as he spoke. "I'm listening."

"Greg phoned. Larry, the lad he planted in the bar was in touch and it seems there is something going down tomorrow."

"But it's Sunday, Joe, the place should be shut!" She sat down on the floor next to Vincent and leaned against him.

"Yeah, I know, but don't you think that's when deliveries would be made, along with the drinks and such like?" he sighed.

"Joe, I have something for you too," and glancing at Vincent she began to fill Joe in with the information and items Tony had passed on.

"Oh, that's great, Cathy," he was really pleased. "Okay, Cath, I'll leave the stake-out to Greg and we'll concentrate on the loose ends on Monday."

"But, Joe, we can't wait that long, if Chad's having a meeting tomorrow then so will Johnson. Maybe even tonight." She was getting hyped-up, Vincent could feel it as she rose from the floor and started pacing around.

"We don't know that, it's only guess work," he was just as excited.

"Check the flights from Australia, see if a Peter Johnson came in on a flight today, or is due tomorrow," she shrugged at Vincent who just nodded.

"Okay, I'll get back to you," and the line went dead.

Vincent came to her as she hung up the phone. "May I suggest you get some warm clothes on, it's cold outside."

She whispered with her head slightly lowered. "I'm really sorry."

"Catherine, don't be. It's the way we are, the way we survive. This will pass." He smiled and kissed her cheek.

The phone rang only once before she lifted it. "Well?"

"You were right, he came in on a flight tonight."

"Great! We could get them all, Joe!"

"We, did you say we?" He wasn't happy with that.

"Yes Joe, we." She was insistent.

"What about your date?"

"He's special Joe, he understands," her voice was lower and she held Vincent's hand.

"Yeah, he must be some guy. When am I going to meet him?"

"Joe, you know I like to keep work and my private life separate."

"Right, okay." He paused. "He's still a lucky guy."

"Joe, please!" She didn't want this to go on.

"Greg will meet us at the rear entrance of the chemist's in about twenty minutes. Can you make it?"

"I'll be there," and this time she hung up the phone.

Looking at Vincent, he gave her a reassuring smile as he pulled her into his arms. They clung together a second or two before he spoke.

"I'll not be far away, Catherine."

She nodded and returned the smile. "I knew you wouldn't want me to go otherwise," and on tip-toes, kissed this extraordinary man with whom she knew she would spend the rest of her life with.

"I never want you to go on these cases, Catherine, but it's part of what you are, and part of what I love." He turned her from him. "Now, get ready," and slapped her bottom as she went to change.

Glancing over her shoulder she wrinkled up her nose at him. They appeared light-hearted but inside, knew there was an element of risk attached to this assignment; something they both dearly wanted to avoid if possible.

* * *

Greg turned to Joe. "Sure she said she was coming?" It was time she arrived.

"Oh yeah! She's coming, don't doubt it!" and with that, Cathy came up behind them.

"Hi!" She turned to Greg. "Any idea what we may have here?"

"Hi, Cathy," he nodded to the entrance. "I've got two men covering the front but so far, nothing. We can only hope it's tonight."

"It has to be," Joe whispered. "He's got a flight out tomorrow night."

"Are all his trips so short?" Cathy asked.

"No, but we think this is a panic trip. Everet is putting on the pressure for more powder and Johnson's not too pleased!"

"And the club?"

Greg looked around, hearing a noise, but saw nothing. "It's covered and I've got a direct line with Larry."

Before they could talk more, the headlights of a car came around the corner and into the alley, leaving tracks in the thin layer of snow.

"Over here!" and they scrambled behind the rubbish skip.

The car door slammed and they could hear voices.

"You got the key?"

"Give me a break, of course I've got the damn key!"

"All right, all right."

"How much did you take over this time?"

"Double, but we've got to get rid of that Everet!"

There was a banging sound as the outside door was shut.

"Okay," Joe spoke first. "Get back up, Greg, we're going in."

"Hold on, we only heard two of them, there may be someone in the car," Greg held Joe back, then put in the call. "Oh great! There's a delay with the back up!"

"We can't wait, Joe!" Cathy whispered with as much force as if she had shouted.

"I know, I know! You ready?" He glanced at Catherine's gun.

"Ready."

"Okay, Radcliffe, let me lead. Greg, you take the rear run."

"Right!"

Joe stalked around the skip but couldn't see anybody in the car, so he waved the others on as he headed to the door.

What he didn't see was the guard standing in the shadows, whose gun reflected in the light shining from the glass at the top of the door.

"Joe! Behind you!" Cathy crouched and fired at the same time as a shot was fired from the shadows. Joe fell to the ground and so did the guard.

"Greg, the front! Warn the front!" Joe shouted as Cathy joined him.

"You okay?"

"Good shot, lady," he was holding his arm.

Greg joined them. "You wait here, Joe." He turned to Cathy. "Ready?"

"Ready."

Greg kicked in the door and gun first, went in, Cathy giving him back up.

"Keep down!" he shouted, as he saw the two men splitting up, one heading for the front, the other to the steps to the upper store. "Cathy! Outside; fire escape!" and as he flew up the stairs she retraced her steps, glanced at Joe, then ran to the metal steps on the other side of the skip.

She couldn't see him and she knew he couldn't have got away. She turned to see if there was another set of steps he could have used. Before she could turn fully, she landed in a heap on the ground as Johnson jumped from directly above her, sending her gun flying and knocking her head on the curb. She lost consciousness just as she recognised a familiar sound – Vincent - then darkness descended.

* * *

Vincent was watching the activity, feeling Cathy's heartbeat racing, but knowing she felt him too. He came closer as she entered the store, but stayed in the shadows as Joe was lying at the door.

Next thing, she was running outside again and looking around, but she didn't see the man above her, and as he raced forward he saw her crash to the ground.

Before he could move, Johnson was thrown against the skip with one blow from Vincent. He slumped, then fell all the way to the ground.

"Catherine, Catherine," he knelt beside her, not concerned at who might see him.

"Vincent," it was barely a whisper but she was coming around. "Vincent go, I'll be okay. Please, leave!" She knew Greg would be here and Joe was on the other side of the skip.

"Are you sure?"

With all her strength, she pulled herself up level with his face. Her head and side hurt, but she smiled at him, kissed his cheek then pushed him lightly away. "Go now, I'll meet you at home."

He was gone from sight but she knew he was still in the shadows.

"Cathy, Cathy." Greg came clambering down the fire escape. "What happened? Are you all right?"

"Yeah, a bit sore, but okay," she smiled and looked at Johnson. "I'm better than him."

"How did you do that?"

"I didn't. He did it to himself."

"What!"

"He jumped me, but didn't realise he was so near the skip." She shrugged her shoulders.

"He rolled off me into that damn thing."

"Good work!" Joe came to join them as Greg pulled her from the ground. Within minutes the place was swarming in blue uniforms and cars with flashing lights.

"Good news," Greg came back from the police car he had been sitting in. "The Ivory Club's been shut down." He smiled. "Everet spoke into our wiretap and hung himself, thanks to young Larry."

"Great guys!" Cathy looked from one to the other. "Does this mean I can go home?"

"You did good, Radcliffe. Yeah, go home to your date - if he's still there!" Joe gave her a friendly peck on the cheek.

"Oh, he's still there, Joe, don't worry," and smiling at both men said, "Good night."

"Oh, Cathy, take Monday off and get a medical check, okay?"

She just raised her hand as she turned around towards her apartment.

* * *

Her head hurt and her shoulder felt bruised, but apart from that she felt a little sick.

The door opened before she could put her key in and she gladly fell into Vincent's arms. He shut the door, locked it and lifted her into his arms. Neither spoke as he took her through the bedroom to the bathroom door where he lowered her to the floor. She was a little shaky, but with Vincent's help she undressed and went to soak in the bath he had prepared for her.

Oh God, that feels good, she thought to herself as she covered herself in bath oils and soap suds. It was a marvel the way he sensed her needs, as she did and her thoughts were full of love.

Fifteen minutes later she was tucked up in bed with hot chocolate and Vincent laying beside her, reading to her in his beautiful soothing voice. They had not talked about the last few hours and no doubt wouldn't until tomorrow, or when she was ready to. Right now, all she wanted was here and finishing her drink she curled into his chest and drifted off into her dreams.

Catherine woke early, felt Vincent warm and close beside her and hugging him close, went back to sleep - not for long however, as she was feeling sick and had to rush to the bathroom.

"Catherine, come and get something to eat," Vincent put his arm around her shoulder as she came out from the shower.

"I don't feel hungry right now."

"You will make yourself sick again if you don't."

She gave in, knowing he would win eventually. Breakfast over, she had to admit she felt better and went to get herself dressed as Vincent had his shower.

They were both reading the papers when the doorbell rang.

"Who is it?" Catherine called through the door.

"Peter, Cathy."

She glanced at Vincent, who didn't look at all surprised and it dawned on her he must have phoned him when she was in the shower.

"Since when did you do house calls on Sundays?" she greeted him, kissing his cheek.

"Cathy, my favourite patient always gets priority treatment," and he patted the side of her face with his usual gentle touch. "Vincent, I'm glad you called, she looks peaky."

"It was you!" She went to him and gave him a love tap as she pushed him down on the couch.

"Cathy, in here," and Peter motioned to the bedroom.

"Peter, I'm fine, there is no need - "

"I'll be the judge of that, come on," and she threw a scowl at Vincent as Peter guided her to the bed.

He was very thorough and even took a blood sample for testing.

"You have a bruise on the side of your head Cathy, but it's not cut and the bruises on your shoulder and side will clear in a couple of days. However, I think you may need some iron and vitamins etc. But I'll give you a ring when I get the results back."

"See! I told you I was okay," and she poked her finger at Vincent's chest.

Peter waited with them for tea and he talked about Patrick and how he was sure the exams wouldn't be any problem to him.

"He has great potential, now he seems to have a goal and a reason to reach it."

"Yes." Vincent put his arm around Catherine. "He and Jamie seem very close."

"More than just close, Vincent," and she turned to look up into his bright eyes.

Peter could see what was developing here, so clearing his throat, decided it was time to leave. "Now, Cathy, a couple of days off and I'll phone as soon as I get the results." He kissed her cheek, shook Vincent's hand and was gone, leaving them alone to their own devices.

Catherine spent Monday alone at her apartment catching up on the everyday chores that had been somehow neglected these past few days. She took her time over this as she was still feeling woozy in the morning.

By lunch time everything was ship-shape and she was relaxing with a cup of coffee when the phone rang.

"Cathy."

"Hi, Joe."

"How's it going, kiddo?"

"Great, I'll be in in the morning," she perked up a bit. "How're things with the case?"

"We've got the date set for two weeks today, so we'll have our tails working overtime."

She smiled at the phone. "When do you want me to take Patrick in?"

"Can you manage it tomorrow? It would be a great head start."

"Yeah, Joe, sure."

"Okay, take it easy and we'll see you in the morning."

"Bye, Joe."

"Bye, Radcliffe."

Looking at the phone a second, she decided to go Below and get Patrick organised for his ordeal and to see Vincent.

"Giddy, Cathy." Patrick beamed at her.

"Hello, Patrick, Jamie. How are you both?" She smiled at them and felt very at ease with their closeness.

"Come and see these plans for the day rooms." They were leaning over some big sheets spread over the chamber floor.

"It looks great, Patrick," then reaching inside her bag said, "This mail came for you. Your ex-flat mate re-directed it to my place. It came this morning."

"What is it?"

"Air mail, but what's inside only you can find out!" She went to Jamie as Patrick opened his letter.

"You look wonderful, Jamie." She squeezed her hand.

"Oh, Catherine, he's so good, so patient with me," she sighed. "I've never felt this way before." They hugged and Cathy just nodded to her friend in complete understanding.

Cathy turned to the entrance, sensing Vincent's approach.

"Jamie! Look at this!" and Patrick handed her the letter.

"Catherine, is this what it appears to be?" Jamie handed it on to Catherine just as Vincent arrived. They exchanged a loving glance before she turned her attention to the letter.

"Congratulations, it seems you are going to get some money your parents set aside for you if you passed your exams." She smiled at Vincent and then at Patrick and Jamie, who were now hugging each other.

"Do you know what this means? I can go ahead with the renovations to the rooms and the living quarters as well!" He hugged her close. "Oh Jamie, this is great!"

"That's good news, Patrick," Vincent shook his hand then turned to Catherine. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine. I came down to see if Patrick will join me at the office tomorrow."

"What time?"

"Just come when you're ready and ask for me," she sighed. "Be prepared for a long stretch though, there's a lot of paperwork."

"No problem."

"Okay, see you then," and she and Vincent left for his chamber.

"Can you stay long enough for tea?" He led her to the big chair by the fire.

"Yes, I didn't go in today; decided to take Peter's advice," and she turned her face upwards to him as he bent and gave her a tender kiss.

"I'm glad. You could do with the rest."

The remainder of the day and early evening were spent Below and by the time Catherine returned to her apartment she felt her old self and ready for work and the trial.

* * *

The last couple of weeks, preparing for the trial had kept Catherine extra busy and she had only seen Vincent once, last weekend.

Joe had let Rita join Cathy on this and they were as ready as they would ever be.

"You okay, Rita?" Cathy breathed in as she lifted her brief case.

"Ready and raring to go!"

"Okay, let's do it," and they headed for the courts and another lengthy session.

They had prepared the case well and by the end of the second week they had got convictions on everyone and Patrick's name was cleared.

Cathy was glad it was over, she still wasn't feeling one hundred per cent and some days couldn't face food at all. However, Rita had come to her rescue a couple of mornings and proved her ability in the court room.

There were great celebrations at the office and Joe was over the moon. "Well Cathy, that's another group of creeps behind bars."

"Yeah! But how many are there out there replacing them already?"

Joe just lifted his eyebrows. "We can only do so much, Cathy!"

"It never seems enough somehow." She smiled at him and patted his cheek. "See you tomorrow."

"You going already?"

"Yeah, I've got an appointment."

"Oh, okay. See you."

The taxi she ordered was waiting for her at the entrance and she gladly climbed into it out of the cold. It took nearly fifteen minutes to get to Peter's surgery but finally she arrived and he greeted her as she came in.

"Cathy, what took you so long to answer my call? I wanted to see you at least three weeks ago!" He led her to the arm chair by his desk.

"I'm sorry, Peter, but you know I was tied up with Patrick's case." She looked up at him. "Cathy, this is important, you should have got back to me." He sat behind the desk. "I left messages all over the place."

"Yeah, I know," she shrugged her shoulders. "I'm sorry."

"You're forgiven," and he grinned across at her.

"Well, now I'm here, what's it all about?"

"Your results - you know - the blood test."

"Right."

"It seems, my dear girl, that you are to become a mother!" He sighed as he looked from his chart over to her. "And you are in need - "

"I'm pregnant?" Her eyes wide, she slumped back in the chair. "I'm going to have a baby?"

"You didn't suspect?" Peter frowned. He thought she would have had some sneaking doubts.

"No, I didn't consider - what I mean is I've been so busy recently." She looked up again. "Oh my God! The funny feelings in the mornings, I never even ... " her voice trailed off.

Peter came from behind his desk and took her hands in his as she sat on the corner of her arm chair, then waited for her to take it all in.

"Cathy, I can't guarantee the outcome, but we can take good care of you and the baby. Also, you need to get some iron and multi-vitamins inside you right away!"

She still hadn't taken it in properly and would need a little time to do so.

"Here's your prescription and make sure you take them."

She nodded and gave him a weak smile. "Peter, I'll get back to you."

"When you're ready Cathy, after you've seen Vincent."

Her head shot up at his words. "Oh God, Peter," she let a tear escape. "What will he feel?"

"Knowing Vincent, he will be delighted."

She wasn't so sure.

"Go home, Cathy. Give yourself some time." He kissed her head And put her in a taxi, frowning as he watched her go. Oh Cathy, you'll need your strength more than ever, now.

The taxi ride home seemed to take forever and Catherine was in turmoil, as well as having a heaving stomach. The apartment was warm and cosy, with the fire light dancing all over the walls. Staring into the flames as she drank her coffee, she still couldn't decide on how to approach Vincent over this and she knew he would have felt her unrest. She sighed and threw another log on the fire, then stretched out on the floor. She soon felt drowsy and exhaustion took over as she fell asleep, curled up and hugging a cushion to her chest.

Vincent could see her curled up and asleep so he came in as quietly as possible and just sat and watched her. How beautiful she was, but what was causing her such pain and turmoil at this time? He had felt her unrest nearly all afternoon and into the evening but he had only now been able to come to her. The snow was deep, it was cold outside now and the darkness came earlier - to his relief - meaning he could spend more time with Catherine.

About an hour later, the hard floor caused her to move and she felt him right away. "Vincent?" she whispered.

He came to her in front of the fire and took her in his arms. "I'm here, Catherine." Without warning she burst into tears and buried her head in his chest. She cried for some time and Vincent never moved or spoke until she was done.

"Tell me." He rubbed her back as he kissed her head.

She pulled away from him to look into his beautiful face and holding tightly onto his hands, she took a deep breath. He searched her face and waited.

"I saw Peter after work today." She paused. "He had the results of my blood test." Vincent tilted his head as he felt her heart beat increase. She lowered her gaze for a second then raised her head to look directly into his blue eyes.

"I'm pregnant, Vincent. I'm expecting our child."

She felt him pull back slightly then he lowered his head again to meet her misty eyes. "A child? Our child?"

His whisper was so quiet. she wasn't at all sure that he had spoken. Slowly he pulled himself up to his full height and walked towards the balcony doors. Catherine felt panic. He's leaving!

In fact, he just opened the doors to go outside and lean over the balcony to take in the cold night air. He threw his head backwards and for an instant she thought he was going to let out one of his roars.

Oh God! No! She shut her eyes, tears building up within her.

When she opened them again he was walking towards her. Every part of her cried out for him, but she was frozen to the spot. He came to her and captured her in a warm, loving embrace.

"Oh Vincent, I'm sorry, I know your views on - "

"Shsshhh, Catherine," he rocked her in his arms. "Never be sorry." He looked down at her. "Never that," and his soft velvet tones, flowing within her told her all she needed to know. She ran her hands upwards and behind his neck as she looked into his beautiful eyes. She noticed the tear drops as he spoke.

"Our child, Catherine! A special child! Created from our special love." He smiled his broadest smile as he lowered his lips to hers and they were once more floating in that love. Finally, they managed to regain their control and collect themselves.

"Are you all right?" Vincent tenderly touched her stomach. "There is no trouble?" Catherine covered his hand with hers and left her other one on his shoulder.

"Everything is fine; is going to be fine and besides you have a seven month wait before you are allowed to start worrying." She quietly laughed with him as the excitement took over from fear and concern.

A new life, a new beginning, full of hope and dreams to be shared, with a love that most life times would never know!

* * *

Part Two

DOUBLE CEREMONY

Catherine shut her diary in frustration. Her previous entries included Patrick coming into their lives, the trial and his acquittal, to enable him to lead the life he had now decided on.

His stay Below with Vincent and Father had helped him to complete his studies and Peter had guided him through his exams and supported him whenever he could.

She smiled warmly as she thought of them and how Father now had another doctor in the family. She said Family, as Father had become very close to Patrick over the last year and even though there would never be a replacement for Vincent, she did feel he was a substitute for Devin who, she somehow knew, might never return.

Sighing, she put the diary away and went to put the kettle on and make a bite to eat. Oh Lord! Work was beginning to take its toll and she was pretty tired some nights, but it had become a little easier since Joe had transferred Rita full time to her.

Joe! Oh, Joe, how I wish I could tell you more! She stirred her tea and let her mind wander back over the last few months.

Sipping her drink she stared out of the windows into space and remembered how she had felt such distress and worry at telling Vincent she was pregnant; then her surprise and joy when his reaction was one of love and happiness. He was worried at first, for her and how it might change their feelings, but that was quickly replaced with his deep love and never ending devotion.

Her hand went down to her stomach as she recalled Joe's face when she told him she was going to have a baby. It was a treat! He went from disbelief to happiness and then concern, all in a few minutes. But when he finally came down to earth, he was wonderful. He had always been a good friend, never asked too many questions and supported her whenever she needed it. Now, more than ever he had helped her and she would have loved to have told him about Vincent and reassure him she was going to be all right. With only another couple of weeks at work left, time was short. She would ask Vincent tonight - if he was back!

Oh, Vincent, I miss you so much! She knew they were away longer than they had planned; more so now because Vincent just didn't want to be away from her at all if it could be avoided, but he had to check this new source of water. It was important to the community and if it could be channeled to the tunnels they could go ahead with plans for up-dating the showers and bathrooms throughout the private chambers.

She sighed and realised how alone she felt when Vincent couldn't see her. *I'll be glad to move Below.* A smile creased her lips at the thought of it. She loved it down there and she was never - had never - been anything but content there.

Father wouldn't let her go down alone now. He always sent Jamie if Vincent was busy and it amused her at how he had become the doting grandfather already.

The day they told him their news had been a nightmare for her. Even with his more liberal views, she was well aware that a child was not in the plan of things. Closing her eyes, her memory became alive with the visions of Father.

"Do you know what you have done?" He was struggling to control himself. "Vincent, you have had such strong feelings about this before, why now? Why cause such a risk to Catherine?" For all his anger at them, his main concern was one of pure, simple love and affection.

She had gone to him and kissed his cheek, held his hands and looked into his troubled eyes. He closed them and shook his head.

"Oh, Catherine, your love for my son is overpowering, but for once, listen to an old, worried man!"

She had not answered right away, but lifted her hand to his cheek and gently held it there until he covered it with his own.

"Father, we know what we have done and we understand your reaction." She glanced at Vincent who came forward and placed his arm around Father's sagging shoulders. "But believe in us, in our love and our joy that now we are complete in our happiness, and whatever comes we will share it together, always."

He bit his lower lip and they could see the tears threatening as he closed his eyes once more and leaned against his son.

He slowly collected himself and a deep sigh emerged as he replaced his glasses to their position on the end of his nose.

"Well now!" he attempted a weak smile. "It seems you have decided and I am to become a grandfather." He leaned forward and returned the kiss to her. "Be happy and I will be here for you, if you need me for anything, anything at all."

She had hugged him to her then and they had struck a new bond, that now was as strong as any Father-Daughter could have and more.

Vincent had remained silent throughout this whole display and had only hugged Father before leaving. However, he spoke to him later that night and between them they overcame his fears, to leave only hope for the future.

She had been daydreaming too long and her tea was cold, so slowly she got up and re-boiled the kettle to make some fresh. Looking at the clock she knew it was time for bed, so drink in hand and turning out the lights, she went through to the bedroom and another restless night of worry for Vincent.

He had said they would be back by Sunday night, but here it was, Tuesday and Father had sent Jamie up to tell her not to come Below until he had news. Patrick had called on her last night to give her a check-up and keep her company for a while, knowing she missed Vincent.

They had enjoyed each other's company. Patrick was full of his new practice and Jamie. Their relationship was growing stronger and above all they worked well together.

He explained how they had completed the renovations from the surgery to the tunnels and how Mouse had designed a form of lift in case of any emergency. His life was full and happy and he owed it all to her, Vincent, Father and a world of loving people who cared enough to give him the hope; the future he never dared dream about.

Before he left, he gave her more iron and stressed she take them, so reaching into her bedside cabinet she did as she was told and took them. She yawned, stretched and rolled over to grab Vincent's pillow to her as she tried to get some badly needed sleep.

* * *

Vincent was unhappy! They had been away too long. He knew Catherine was worried but they were away from the pipes so no message could be sent. They should have gone back but this was a great discovery and they had to check out everything. Now it seemed it was going to be possible to tap this water flow as its origin was an underground river and not anything man made that would draw attention to them in any way.

"Vincent!" Mouse scuttled around a bend in the cave. "Vincent, come see, Mouse found right place." He was jumping about as he spoke. "This way, show you how to get water."

Vincent smiled as he grabbed his shoulder to slow him down. "All right, Mouse, but not so fast, it's dangerous here, we must be careful!"

He turned then to Brian and young David, who had joined them on this trip. "You two stay here, I don't think it will hold all of us," and they nodded at him as they prepared the oil lamps and torches they had with them.

"Vincent."

"Yes, Brian?" He turned to this young man who would move heaven and earth just to be able to help.

"Let me go, I'm smaller and we don't know if that walkway is strong enough."

Vincent took another look along the path Mouse had taken then turned to him. "How wide is it, Mouse?"

"Enough."

"Enough for who?"

"Oh! Mouse, may be."

"What about Brian? Would he be all right?"

"Brian? Okay good, okay fine," and he headed off, looking back at them, waving Brian on to follow.

Vincent held his arm. "Here, I'm not happy with the look of that walkway. Put this guide line around your waist." He smiled at him. "We're not all as good as Mouse on our feet."

"It's okay, Vincent."

"No rope, then you don't go!" Vincent was a little edgy, not just with Brian; he wanted to get back and they all knew it.

"Sorry, Vincent, I'll be as quick as I can," then Brian followed behind Mouse.

Vincent turned to help David feed out the rope when he heard the yell and froze at the sound.

"Brian!" He couldn't see properly so he edged his way a few feet along and even without the lamps his eyesight told him it wasn't Brian that was hurt, it was Mouse. "Brian, are you hurt?" He held his breath, waiting for a reply.

"Vincent, I'm okay. Just a little shook up, but Mouse is hurt." He stopped for air. "He's got his foot caught between two rocks and he hit his head as he fell."

"Is he all right, can you tell from there?" Vincent felt trapped being restricted to this ledge.

"I'm right here with him, Vincent. He's out cold, but I think he's okay." He took in a breath. "I can free his foot but it could be sprained or worse. Can you get another rope to me?"

"David, give me that other coil," Vincent said as he took off his cloak and stretched himself out on the ground. Reaching back, David passed the other rope and Vincent started to crawl forward, just enough to throw the end to Brian.

"Got it!"

"Can you get it around his waist?" Vincent could see him lifting the unconscious form of Mouse.

"Yeah, that's it around him and over his arms." He shifted sideways to pull him up enough to turn him so they could take the strain from the other end.

"Ready?"

"Ready, Vincent." He turned and got up on his knees and lifted Mouse from the dip in the path.

"Slowly."

Vincent shuffled back far enough so he could stand in a position where he was able to take the strain of Mouse's body.

"Wait! His belt's caught on a rock," and Brian reached underneath to free it. Just as he did, the ledge to his right fell away and left a gaping hole.

"Brian! What's happened?"

"God, Vincent, it's amazing!" Brian couldn't believe what he saw. "There's a drain, well sort of, like a man-made waterfall!" He struggled to find the words. "But it's all tiles, coloured tiles; almost like something from Rome, or Italy. I don't know, but it's fantastic and I bet there is more hidden by that loose ground."

"Right, now let's see to Mouse. We can decide what to do about the tiles another time."

"Okay, pull Vincent, I've got his leg free."

Slowly they managed to get him back into the main part of the cave, with Brian close behind.

"How is he?" David asked, looking at the white, still face.

"Not good." Vincent turned him over to see where he hit his head and there, down behind his left ear was a nasty cut and his hair was plastered in blood.

"Is it bad?" Brian came to kneel beside him.

"Bad enough."

"Can we move him like this, Vincent?"

"We will have to, I'm afraid." He bent down to his swollen foot. "It's badly sprained and that cut needs attention." He looked around but there was nothing to use. "Brian, collect the rope up. We can make a hammock." He moved Mouse to a more comfortable position. "I'll take the front and you and David can take it in turns between carrying the light and one end of the rope."

"Great idea, let's get a move on," and they went to work on creating a suitable support to carry Mouse in.

They stopped only once for a drink and a snack, which was why they were finished so quickly.

"Right, Brian, David, I'll roll Mouse over towards me and you put the hammock underneath, then place my cloak between them."

They worked quietly and well. As soon as Vincent rolled Mouse back on top of his cloak they pulled the assorted ropes and were ready to leave.

"It's going to be a long, hard trip, so I think we should start right away."

Brian and David nodded as the latter went to the rear for his first shift with the hammock. "David, you okay?" Brian checked with him.

"Yeah, let's go."

Vincent took the strain as Brian made sure that his cloak - under Mouse - came around and covered him on top as well. Then he lifted the lights and they headed for home.

All the time Vincent was worried; for Mouse and most of all for Catherine. The nearer they got to the chambers, the stronger he could feel her distress. Something was wrong!

* * *

Catherine stirred early and was surprised to discover how well she had slept. Stretching, she slowly got up and headed for the shower, glancing at her bump in the mirror as she passed.

This made her smile and reach down as she thought of Vincent and their future. *Funny to see me this shape*, she thought. *I got off without showing for long enough!*

Getting into the shower, her thoughts went to Jenny and how she was like a mother hen. In one way she was glad Jen was away this week, or she would have killed her with kindness! They went back a long way, the two of them and now they were closer than ever. Her reaction to the baby had been mixed and confused, but loving.

"Cathy, what about the father?" She was so worried. "Will he support you in this? Get married, what?"

"Don't worry Jen, we love each other and yes, he's going to be with me through this." She had spoken to Vincent about Jen and they had agreed she should meet him and be told of their plans.

"For long enough, Cathy, you have kept Vincent from us all, why? Is there reason we have never met?"

"Yes, Jen, a very good reason! But we think it's time now that you did." She smiled as Jen's face glowed with anticipation.

"Really!"

"Yes, really."

"When? Where?" She was almost jumping up and down.

"Slow down, Jen!" And they had laughed together like kids going on a first outing.

"Oh, Cathy, I envy you and Vincent." She hugged her close. "You have been held together by a special kind of love, I've seen it in you when you talk about him, which isn't often I might add, but I'm happy for you."

"Cheer up," Cathy had told her. "Your turn will come."

"Yeah! Pigs can fly too!"

Cathy laughed to herself as she shampooed her hair. Then, as the water rinsed her, she saw again Jenny's expression the day she actually came face to face with Vincent.

. . .

"Where in God's name are we going, Cathy?" Jenny was not dressed for a treasure hunt.

"I told you to wear casual gear!" Cathy smiled back at her.

"Have you seen me in jeans?" she laughed.

"Okay, this way."

"You have to be kidding!"

"No, I'm not and relax, you'll be very pleasantly surprised when we get there," and she had guided her through the tunnels, passing one or two people on the way.

"Ah, Cathy," Jenny tapped her shoulder. "You know you told me how this was a secret place and I wasn't to mention it to anyone?"

"Yeah."

"Is it because people actually live here?" She smiled as Cathy spoke to a passing child.

"Kipper, this is my friend, Jenny."

"Hi."

"Hi - Kipper?"

"Catherine, Vincent said he would be in Father's chamber," and the boy gave a broad grin.

"Thank you, Kipper. Where are you off to?" She noticed the skate board.

"To the park. I'm meeting Patrick and we're going to see a skate board competition across town."

"That's great. Have a good time."

"I will," and he was gone.

"Patrick! The doctor?" Jen asked.

"Yes, but it's a long story and we don't have time right now, we're expected!" And grabbing her hand they headed for Father's chamber.

"Good God!" And Jenny just stood and did a sweeping survey of Father's cluttered chamber. "Is this for real?"

Cathy had left Jenny at the top of the steps and gone down to meet Father as he came towards her.

"Catherine," he grinned at her. "You made it all right."

"Yes, Father, but I'm not sure about Jenny," she whispered rather loudly.

"I heard that!" And Jen came to join them.

"Jenny, I want you to meet Vincent's father, Dr Jacob Wells," and Cathy put her arm through his as Jenny shook hands.

"Hi, I'm pleased to meet you," she nodded towards her friend. "Cathy tried to prepare me, but I have to say I'm impressed!"

"Well, thank you," Father motioned to the chairs. "Please, join me for some tea."

"Where's Vincent?" Catherine asked quietly.

"Oh! Would you go for him, he's just had to shower. Mouse took him on another goose-chase!" He chuckled. "You'd think Vincent would have learned his lesson by now!"

"Can I leave Jen in your safe hands for five minutes?"

"By all means. I'll enjoy some new conversation," and poured them tea. "I won't be long, Jen."

"Hey, don't hurry on my account, I think I'm going to enjoy myself," and she gave Father a brilliant smile.

She left them content in each other's company and headed through to Vincent's chamber.

"I thought you were never coming," and he pulled her to him.

"Well now, have you been scheming with Father to get me alone?" She put her arms around his neck as he kissed her.

"Would I do that?" He smiled at her and squeezed her tight, kissing her cheek, ear and then her lips. Pulling away he lowered his hand to her stomach and she could see his eyes sparkle. "Is everything all right?" His whispered tones were velvet soft and she could feel her heart lurch.

"Oh, Vincent, everything is perfect." She hugged into his chest. "I love you," and they just stood, holding onto each other, letting their love flow between them.

"Come, it's time," and he released her at last.

"Yes, we had better rescue Father." Turning hand in hand, they returned to the central chamber.

"Shhh," Catherine held Vincent back. "Listen."

They stopped and could hear the laughter coming from Father's chamber. "Well, they don't seem to have missed us!" She smiled up at him and he tilted his head sideways.

"No, Catherine! We are not going back!" And he gave her a fleeting kiss before guiding her down the steps.

Jenny's mouth dropped open and her eyes became enormous as she watched Catherine with this extraordinary man at her side. What a couple they made: she, small and beautiful; he tall, well built and also beautiful. God, what a sight! She swallowed, then glanced at Jacob and could see the pride on his face as he straightened up to his full height, leaning on his walking stick.

"Ah, Vincent, Catherine, we have fresh tea." He took her hand as she came near.

"Thank you, Father," and she gently squeezed it, then turned to Jen. "Jenny, I would like you to meet Vincent." Her voice was soft and full of love.

"No wonder you've kept him a secret, Cathy," she let out a sort of whistle as he took her hand. "You're something else, Vincent."

"Thank you, Jenny," he smiled, his blue eyes teasing her. "Catherine says much the same of you."

Jen laughed and they all sat around the large table to take tea.

. . .

It seemed like yesterday, Catherine thought as she turned off the shower and reached for the towel. Jenny had been Below a few times with her since and spent time with Father and Mary, who found her company so enjoyable.

Catherine dried her hair and was feeling much better today. Thank goodness the morning sickness had passed, it was a misery to her. Going back to the bedroom she was trying to decide what to wear when the phone rang.

"Cathy, you okay?" Joe asked first.

"Yeah, I'm great! Why?" She frowned at the phone.

"I need your help," he was sounding tired.

"Are you all right, Joe? Is there something wrong?"

"Yeah, I'm afraid there is." He sighed down the phone, "and only you can help me."

"How?"

"The Harrison case."

"I thought you had that all wrapped up, Joe." She sat on the edge of the bed and went back over the case. She had helped Joe out a couple of months ago and questioned an eye witness who saw a young girl beaten and assaulted.

Jilly Harrison was her name, landlady of 'Disrepute', but fair to her girls and so far, no harm had come to any of them - until now. The two men had both arrived, the worse for wear, but seemed okay until it was time to leave. One left, the other decided to tear the place apart instead of paying his way and the young girl had seen it all and called the police right away.

"Cathy! You still there?" Joe's voice snapped her back to reality.

"Yeah, Joe, sorry."

"It's Jilly." He was frustrated. "She's changed her mind about giving evidence. God damn it, Cathy! We had this thing in a nut shell!"

"How can I help?"

"She said she would talk to you." He let out a breath. "It seems that Jackson's brother - the one with him on the night - is threatening her with a gun and she's frightened."

"Where can I see her?"

"I thought the courthouse, early, in case you can get her to agree to go on in time for questioning."

"Sounds okay by me." She glanced at her watch. Seven thirty am. "Give me time to get ready and I'll meet you there in an hour."

"Great, Radcliffe, sure you're up to a day in court?"

She looked down at herself and laughed. "Well, Joe, I won't be able to lean over the desk the same, but I can still ask questions!"

"That's my girl. See you in an hour."

"Joe - who's the judge?"

"O'Hara. Kate O'Hara, why?"

"No reason, I just like to know, that's all."

"She been on with you before?"

"A-ha."

"And?"

"It was okay. She's good."

"Right. See you; one hour."

"Yeah, see you."

The line went dead and Catherine re-dialled right away.

"Patrick? Cathy - hi. Thought I'd let you know I won't be at the office today, I've got to go to court. Yes, I'll be fine, but I'll give you a number to reach me if there's any news." She read out a number to him and added, "When you hear, let me know. Oh yes, we'll hear today ... How do I know? Believe me Patrick, we'll hear today." Then smiling and finishing her little chat, she said good bye and got dressed.

Court. Yes she would enjoy today and she had this inner feeling about Vincent too. He was coming home.

* * *

Father was getting a little bothered. Vincent and Mouse were overdue and there was no message. lie sighed. That could only mean they were still below pipe level.

"Father," Pascal came in.

"Yes, any word?" He turned in his large chair and removed his glasses.

"No, I'm sorry, nothing."

"I fear that something has happened. It's not like them to be so overdue."

"Should we send a small party down to look for them?"

"No! No, we must wait a little longer," he gave another sigh. "Besides, there was only a rough route made and they may have diverted anywhere along the way."

"I'll put a twenty-four hour watch on the lower pipes, just to be on the safe side." Pascal turned as he finished speaking to see Jamie come in.

"Jamie, is Catherine all right?" Father rose straight away, concern written all over his face.

"Yes Father, she seems fine." She came down the steps to join them. "But she phoned Patrick early this morning to say she would be in court all day and to leave a phone number. She wants us to phone when Vincent gets back today."

"When Vincent gets back?" Father asked.

"Yes. She told us she knew he would be home today." Jamie turned from Father to Pascal and shrugged her shoulders.

"Catherine has become as strong as Vincent in their connection." Father looked at them both standing in front of him. "So, if she feels that strongly then we should be ready for them. Pascal, perhaps an extra look out would be in order after all."

"Yes, Father, I'll see to it."

"I must get back too," Jamie turned to go. "Patrick's on his own and the place was full."

"Give him my regards, Jamie."

"I will. Good bye, Father."

* * *

"Morning, Joe," Cathy greeted her boss with a radiant smile.

"My, don't we look chirpy today," he replied as he took her arm and led her to the small office they were to use.

"Okay, what's first, Joe?" Cathy sat down at the desk and opened the case file in front of her.

"Jilly is being brought in here ... " he looked at his watch. " ... Should be any time now."

"How should I handle her?" Cathy flipped over the pages. "Same as before?"

"No! Let's offer her more; complete relocation, papers, the lot. We need her, Cathy."

"What about the brother? Is he under surveillance?"

"Yeah, but we're stretched for bodies and I've only got cover for forty-eight hours."

"Is that all!"

"Afraid so."

"God, let's hope I can convince her to get up on that stand." She sighed and went to the coffee machine. A knock on the door made her turn around and Joe let the visitor in.

"Hello, Jilly," Catherine gave her a welcoming smile.

"Miss Chandler," she nodded at her then seemed to notice her bump. "You sure look healthy!"

"Thank you, I'm feeling fine," and they smiled at each other, as Catherine returned to her seat behind the old desk. "Now, Jilly," Cathy's voice was gentle. "I hear there have been some threats to you over this case."

"Not just threats, Miss Chandler." She got out a packet and lit up a cigarette; took in a deep breath before going on. "Jackson's brother got to me and shoved a gun in my face. Told me if I got up in court and said my bit he would kill me!" She forcefully stubbed out the half-finished cigarette and lit another straight away.

Catherine waited and watched her as she struggled to go on, thinking she had probably been a good looking woman in her day.

"Miss Chandler, I am scared, bloody scared and I'm not sure I want to testify now!" She blew smoke towards Cathy, who pulled back to try and avoid it.

"Okay then, let's take a look at this from both angles." She came from behind the desk and perched herself against it. "If you go out there on the stand today, you will help put a criminal away. We can relocate you, give you a new name and a new life." She let out a long sigh. "On the other hand, if you don't testify you will be at the mercy of both the Jackson brothers and will probably end up like young Faye." She turned around and lifted the file from the desk. "I don't want to alarm you or frighten you any more than you are already, but please consider very carefully before you make up your mind."

Jilly got up and walked the length of the small room several times.

"A new name; new place to live?" She turned to Catherine who nodded. "Nobody will know about this or what my life has been?"

"Nobody."

She lit another cigarette and drew in a long deep breath, turning the cigarette around in her fingers and staring at the smoke coiling upwards as she thought, hard.

"Cathy," Joe came back in. "Ten minutes."

"Okay Joe, thanks." She nodded at him to wait a little longer. He tapped his watch as he left them alone. "Jilly," Cathy spoke quietly and in gentle tones. "It's your choice, but we must know which one you are going to take."

"Hell! Okay, Miss Chandler, I'll do it, but only if you will be in court too!"

"I'll not only be there, I'll be doing the questioning." She placed a hand on her shoulder.

"Thank you."

"Cathy." Joe came back looking nervous.

"It's okay we're a go," and she smiled at him as he visibly changed colour with the relief.

He came over to Jilly and shook her hand.

"Thank you, thank you."

Then an officer came and took her away to wait her ordeal. She looked over her shoulder at Catherine who gave her a reassuring smile, before turning away.

"Right, Radcliffe, let's get this case over with before I turn grey!"

"Oh! I think you're too late," and with a wicked twinkle in her eye, she looked over his hair.

"Very funny."

Relaxed and ready, they picked up their brief cases, files and notes then left for Number 2 court and a hectic day.

* * *

"Vincent, I'm sorry, but we will have to stop for a moment," Brian's face told a thousand stories and Vincent felt guilty at the pace he had set.

Up until now, neither of his companions had complained and they had made great progress. Looking about him, he was sure that within an hour or so they would be near the lower pipes and they could relay a message for help.

Slowly, Brian lowered the still body of Mouse to the ground and Vincent once more checked him. He had stirred a couple of times and to their relief he was coherent and had squeezed Vincent's hand before returning to the darkness.

"We will be near help soon." Vincent handed them the canteen and pressed Brian's shoulder to reassure him. "From now on you can both take the rear and I will lead."

"But, Vincent, how will you manage the light?" David knew it wasn't a problem for Vincent to see, but they needed to know where they were going.

"We will attach one to each side of the hammock for now and see how we get on."

They nodded at the idea and rose to share the weight as Vincent adjusted the ropes.

"Okay Vincent, we're ready."

"Right. We must go as quickly as we can," and they moved off in an upward direction. They made good progress and within the hour they spotted the first length of pipe, but had to pass it as it was not connected.

"The relay pipes are about half an hour away," David calculated.

"Yes, I think you're right," and without waiting any longer, they moved off again.

It was less than twenty minutes later when they came across the pipes they were looking for. They gently laid Mouse down, who was stirring again, before Vincent started to tap on the pipes. It took longer than they thought to get a reply; nearly half an hour after he started, Vincent got an answer and they headed off right away.

"We must keep passing messages every half an hour for them, to track us." Vincent sounded much happier as he had asked for a message to be sent to Catherine.

He was worried about Mouse and knew they should get him back, but Catherine was uppermost in his mind. He could feel her mixed emotions and also her worry for him.

"Vincent!" David shouted, as he saw him stumble, then fall to the ground.

"I'm sorry! How is Mouse?" Looking back at the hammock they discovered the cloak had broken the fall and no harm had been done.

But Vincent was in great pain, his shoulder was burning and his stomach was sending him very strange signals. Catherine! Getting up, he said urgently, "We must hurry."

"Are you sure you're all right?" Brian was worried. Vincent was not one to fall without reason.

"We must hurry!" and he stepped up the pace. Catherine was in need of him.

Catherine felt the morning session was long and by lunch time recess, her feet were swollen.

"How's it going, Cathy, you okay?" Joe could see she was looking a bit tired.

"I'm fine Joe; just want to get on with it," and stretching slightly she turned to him. "Faye's in a bad way. Jackson made a real mess of her face."

"Yeah! But she did well up there today," and Joe nodded towards the witness box. "Yes, she did and with Jess to back up her story, we'll have him!" She shut her eyes a moment. "Ow!" She automatically touched her bump.

"What! What!" Joe sat bolt upright.

Cathy laughed. "It's only the baby moving Joe, I'm okay." She was whispering this fact when everyone came back into the courtroom.

"All rise," the Clerk shouted and things started to stir at last.

After an hour of questions and counter-questions, it was time for Jilly to take the stand. She watched Catherine with a fixed, glazed look as she started to ask her questions. She was nervous and on edge, but Cathy's easy caring manner soon helped to relax her and she gave all the right answers to her questions.

Glancing over at Jackson every now and then, Catherine felt a little uneasy. He sat there smiling at them, with a supercilious look she did not trust. It was as if he was waiting, expecting the unexpected to happen.

Sighing under her breath, Cathy prepared herself for the final round of questions and turned towards Jilly in the witness box. As she lifted the folder in her hand the door to the courtroom crashed open and shots were fired in all directions as Jackson's brother came flying forward.

Everyone ducked, but his aim had been directed at Jilly and it seemed he had made his mark. The only thing was, he not only got her, but Catherine too and she lay stretched out, where only minutes earlier she had stood speaking to a now dead woman.

"I told you I'd get you, you bitch!" Jackson shouted as he was sent thundering, face down to the floor by uniformed guards.

His brother had been overpowered as soon as the action had started and Joe could hear the mouthful of abuse coming from his direction.

"Cathy! Cathy!" He searched the floor area and went cold all over as he crawled across to where she lay. "Oh God! Cathy!"

She was bleeding from the shoulder area and had some blood covering her face.

"Someone get an ambulance! Now! Hurry!" He was shouting like a madman and it seemed nobody had paid any attention to him. The tears were flowing freely as he held her hand and brushed the hair away from her face. "Hold on Radcliffe, hold on!" he sniffed and used the sleeve of his shirt to wipe away the tell-tale drops on his face.

"Joe."

He jerked his head around to see Dr Alcott and a medical crew.

"How - ?"

"The judge, she phoned right away. I know her and she knew I knew Cathy." He gently came level with Joe. "Please, go sit over there until I've seen to her."

"Yeah, yeah! Will she - "

"I don't know, but I'll fill you in as soon as I do. Please!" and he motioned for Joe to give them room.

He rose from the floor and backed up to a chair, somewhere in the room. He glanced around and realised that there were others injured and in need of attention.

"Joe Maxwell!"

"Here!"

"You're wanted on the phone, sir, in the Judge's Chamber." The officer was pointing to the door on the left.

He glanced at Peter crouched on the floor, leaning over Cathy, then turned to take the phone call.

"Right, slowly now," and Peter helped get Cathy into the ambulance. He sighed a sigh of relief. The baby appeared to be all right, but Cathy's shoulder had a bullet in it and her head was cut where she had hit the witness box as she fell.

"No! Not the hospital, Jake," he said to the driver. "Patrick Collins' surgery is nearer and he has everything we need."

"Okay, Doc, you're the boss," and he pulled away at top speed.

Patrick was ready for them, as Judge O'Hara had phoned on Peter's request, to warn him and prepare what was needed.

"How is she?" He took in a deep breath as he saw the lifeless, white body of Catherine.

"Not good," was all Peter said and they wasted no more time as she was rushed straight through to have the bullet removed and the baby checked. X-rays were taken, drips connected and bandages wrapped around shoulder and head.

"Let's see now." Patrick showed Peter the X-rays and he nodded. "Thank God! No broken bones; no internal damage at all."

"The baby, Peter; from the scan it looks as if everything is okay, but you know with a fall like she had, it could bring her on."

"Yes, I know." He wasn't feeling too good himself. "Has there been any word from Vincent?"

Patrick shook his head. "No, not yet." He sighed. "He's still not back as far as I know."

"Let's go see her."

"Yeah, I feel the same."

The two men returned to the room they had put her in, with Mary and Jamie keeping constant watch.

"How is she?" Peter bent to Mary.

"She's restless." Mary was holding her hand and looking up at Peter. "She came round a while ago and all she said was, 'Vincent', over and over; just 'Vincent'." Mary's tears were dripping down her cheek.

Jamie went to Patrick who took her in his arms and held her close. He was well aware of the strong feelings they had for Catherine and he was not untouched himself. They watched and waited until slowly and a little groggily, Catherine came round.

"Vincent?"

"Cathy, it's Peter." He waited for this to sink in. "You were shot and have a head injury as well."

"Oh God! Where's Vincent?"

"Cathy, listen to me," he was trying to distract her. "We think the baby may come on early, so if you feel anything at all, please let us know."

She tried to open her eyes, but was not ready for that yet. Then, without warning she let out a cry of pain and pulled her legs up.

"I knew it, I had a gut feeling!" and Patrick flew to her side. "Mary, let's get ready, it's going to be a long night." He glanced at Peter leaving the room.

"Keep an eye on her while I scrub up, Patrick."

"Right you are."

"Vincent!" Cathy sobbed, "Where - " and she faded once more.

But the baby was not going to be put off and before long, Catherine was brought back to a half-awake, half-dreamlike sensation and she was aware that things were happening to her, but she felt so weak, so out of control.

Then, without warning she turned to face Peter, standing by her side and taking her pulse. She gave him a happy smile.

"It's all right, I'll be all right now!" It was so softly spoken he had to lean forward.

"What, Cathy, what is it?"

"Vincent. He's coming," and before she could say more, another contraction caused her to cry out.

* * *

Pascal came running and Father turned sharply to face him.

"Well, man, what news!" He practically snapped at him.

"David, Brian and the others will be here within the hour." He gasped for breath.

"Thank God!"

"I've got a stretcher coming with Mouse, it sounds as if he's coming around."

"Good, good!" He sighed and removed his glasses. "They didn't say anything to Vincent?"

"Father, there was no need to, the first words he spoke were, 'how's Catherine'." He shrugged his shoulders at the older man who raised his eyes to the chamber roof.

"Where is he?"

"He left them behind as soon as help arrived."

"Well, I should think he will be - "

"Father."

Turning round, he saw his son, a little worse for wear, but magnificent, just the same.

"God, Vincent, are you all right?"

"I am not concerned with me, Father, what's happened to Catherine?" He was stalking across the chamber. "I felt her pain, I still feel it! Is it the baby? Father, tell me."

"Vincent, if you would let me get a word in edge ways, I could tell you." He spoke as calmly as he was able.

"Well?"

Breathing in, he relayed to Vincent what Jamie had come and told him.

"I would be with her, but I was waiting to see how Mouse is first." He went to his son and held him back from flying up the steps.

"Vincent!"

He turned.

"You cannot go to her as you are, you must shower and change first." He gave a weak smile. "You may cause her more distress if she sees you this way."

He hung his head and then slowly turned and hugged his Father.

"She's all right Vincent, she knows you're coming."

He looked a little surprised at that statement. "She knows I'm back?"

Father nodded. "It was Catherine who told us to expect you today." He smiled. "She's a remarkable woman."

"I know," and with that he turned and left.

Father sighed and collected his black bag just as Pascal came back.

"Mouse's in the hospital chamber."

"Thank you. Is he awake?"

"Yes and rather angry with himself." Pascal had to smile, as keeping him down was going to be a problem - not his injuries.

"Very well, let's see what we can do," and both men knew the fun was yet to start!

* * *

Peter was not exactly worried, but he wasn't happy either. Catherine was one of the strongest young women he had ever come across and her love for Vincent was beyond anything he could explain. Yet, for all that, this child was anxious to get out into the world and its forced early entry was causing discomfort and pain to Cathy.

"Cathy." Peter spoke to her softly and lovingly. "It won't be long now, just a little hiccup to your system." He smiled. "Most pregnant women don't go around getting themselves shot!"

She forced a smile and squeezed his hand. "Peter, can I go Below for the birth? Have I time?"

"Below! Now?" He was flustered over this. "No! No it's not possible."

"Why not?" And everyone turned to the figure that filled the doorway.

"Vincent!" She lifted her hand to him.

"I'm here," and he kissed her as he took her hand.

"I knew you would come," she beamed at him, through half shut eyes that shone on meeting his.

"Patrick," Peter called him over. "She wants to go Below. I'm not happy about it, but can it be done?"

"Oh yes, no problem." Patrick didn't have any doubts, he was well aware of why she wanted to have Vincent's child Below. "The lift is working and there's room for the trolley. Yeah! No problem!"

Peter frowned. *Young folk, so casual about the whole thing.* Then all that could be heard was Peter tutting to himself!

Vincent held her hand tight as another pain shot through them. He was feeling it with her and she knew it.

"Vincent, I want to go Below, please!"

"I know, Catherine, I know, but let's see what Peter and Patrick feel," and he turned to them as they joined them at her bedside.

Peter was looking at the X-rays again and Patrick checked Catherine's shoulder and head before giving her a complete check. He noticed that since Vincent had arrived, both mother and child had become calmer, less demanding on each other.

He smiled to himself as he realised that their bond had been passed on and their child was already responding to it.

"What do you think, Peter? Can I take her Below?" Vincent's look was a pleading one.

"Oh! Very well! But you must let me make sure Father is ready for you first," and turning from them he motioned Jamie over with his hand and explained things to her before patting her shoulder and sending her Below.

The lift worked without any trouble and within an hour Catherine was in the hospital chamber and being fussed over by Father.

"Well, young lady," Peter sat on the bed and took her hands in his, "You are in most capable hands here and I must return Above." He sighed. "Besides, Kate O'Hara will be after me to find out about you, so I've some sharp talking to do!" He smiled warmly at her.

"Oh, Peter, once again, thank you." She gave him a smile that said it all and he nodded his reply.

"Peter," Vincent put a hand on his shoulder. "Would you please tell Joe that she's safe and well - and with me." He tilted his head towards Catherine who was overflowing with love for his feelings. He knew she was worried about Joe and that he would be concerned over her.

"I shall, Vincent."

"Thank you."

"Take care of her, Vincent, she's special to us too, you know." He bent and kissed her cheek. "I'll be back to see you as soon as possible."

"Good bye, Peter, I'll keep you informed."

"Thanks, Jacob, if you need me - "

"I'll be in touch right away."

"Good luck to you both," and with a last glance at Cathy, Kipper led him away.

Vincent knew Cathy's time was near now, he could feel it and he also knew she was in a great deal of pain. A fact that she was trying to hide as much as she could.

"Father."

"I know, Vincent," he placed a hand on his son's shoulder. "It won't be much longer now." He turned from him. "Mary."

"I'm ready, Jacob," she whispered back.

"Fine."

Vincent turned to his Father. "How is Mouse?"

"Ah! Mouse," he grinned at his son. "You did well, Vincent. His injuries aren't too serious but I'm afraid trying to get him to stay put is our main problem." They quietly laughed at this thought.

"Mouse?" Catherine asked between contractions.

"He got hurt on our excursion, but don't worry, there's nothing seriously wrong." He smiled as he kissed her hand yet again. "I'll tell you all about it when you're better."

She squeezed his hand as another, longer more painful contraction tore at her. "Vincent!"

"We are here, Catherine, be brave," and he stood to brush the damp hair away that was sticking to her face.

"Mary! It's time," and Father took control.

Nearly an hour later, with Catherine so weak, the sound of a crying child caused her to release the flood of tears she had been holding back for so long.

"Vincent, what - "

"We have a son, Catherine, a beautiful boy!" He handed over the wriggling bundle to her good side. She stared in amazement at the child lying against her soaking body. Looking up at Vincent with all her love, she could see he was bursting with pride, love and every emotional feeling that any one person could have.

"Catherine, I love you!" He couldn't manage to say anything else as there was a lump in his throat the size of a baseball! He bent and tenderly kissed her, then gently laid a kiss on his son's head.

They both admired the small child, now lying sleeping in her arms. He was long and covered from tip-to-toe with a fine, fair layer of hair - nothing out of the normal. His eyes were blue - not the same beautiful blue of his father's (perhaps that would come later) - he had Catherine's nose, and slightly heavy eyebrows with a head of hair the colour of copper containing hints of blond streaks.

"Congratulations you two," Father said, "you have given me an exceptional grandson!" Kissing Cathy, he turned to Vincent. "She must rest now."

"Yes, Father, just a few more minutes, I promise."

"All right, but no longer." He turned and nodded to Mary who came and took his grandson from its mother. "We will look after him in the nursery until you regain your strength."

Cathy didn't want to be parted from her son, but had to be realistic and admit she was far from well enough to care for him properly. Now that the ordeal of the birth was over, all her other parts were causing a great deal of pain.

Vincent kissed his son before he was taken away and Father left to check on Mouse as Patrick arrived.

"I see I'm too late," and held out his hand to Vincent. "Congratulations."

Vincent was beaming and Patrick could almost feel the connection between him and Cathy. She was very pale and only half awake as he went to her.

"Well done, Cathy, I feel like an uncle!"

She turned her head on the pillow to look at him and gave him the best smile she could before exhaustion took over.

"She's some lady," and he automatically checked the bandages before going back to stand beside Vincent.

"Keep an eye on her all night and tell Father I'm staying Below in case he may need me for anything."

"I'll tell him Patrick, thank you." Vincent left him then and settled down in a chair to spend the night beside his love. *Oh Catherine, you are a miracle to me*, he whispered and leaned forward to kiss her head.

"I love you too." It was so faint he thought he had imagined it, but looking down, he saw she had a smile on her face even though her eyes were shut.

He smiled to himself and sat back with a book on his knee, ready to read, but unable to take his eyes from Catherine. His mind was a theatre of thoughts; everything that they had shared was in technicolour and as vivid as the day they happened.

But now there were new dreams, new hopes that would include the proof of their love - their child, their beautiful child.

Catherine had made all his dreams come true but for one. Slowly he put his hand inside the leather pocket within his wide belt and took out the small box.

Mouse had spent many hours working on this crystal and gold ring, just for Catherine. He adored her and loving Vincent the way she did was the ultimate, as far as he was concerned.

Vincent let out a long sigh and replaced the tiny box to its safe place. The time would soon be right.

Catherine stirred and was restless as the night became day. Her temperature was creeping up and she was soaking wet. Vincent had been bathing her face when Father had come in to check his patient.

"How long as she been like this?"

"Not long, Father, but it has taken a hold." He looked worried. "She's burning up."

"Yes, I can see that," and he took her temperature before checking her wounds. "Mary, some fresh clothes, sheets and a basin, please," and he set about changing her bandage.

The shoulder was the cause of the fever and needed constant attention.

"It's my fault, I should have changed this earlier." He watched her flinch as he worked around the wound.

"Father," Catherine's voice was merely a whisper.

"Did I hurt you?" He stopped in his tracks.

"No, no, it's all right, really," and as bad as she felt, she still managed a smile for him.

"Our baby, can I see him?" She turned to Vincent before fixing her gaze back on Father.

"When we have you cleaned up and feeling better, of course you can!" He returned his attention to rebandaging her shoulder.

Vincent came closer and kissed his sleeping beauty. "Good morning," he whispered in his velvet voice.

"You were here all night, I felt you." She lifted her hand to his face.

"I know you did."

"You had some beautiful thoughts, were they about us?"

"Mmm." He smiled a broad smile, his eyes twinkling like diamonds as he tenderly took her hand and kissed it.

"Ah, Mary, good." Father was glad of the distraction. "Right young lady, I'll leave you and Mary to get on with it," and he moved to leave. "Vincent."

"Yes, Father?"

"If you can tear yourself away for five minutes, we can have some tea and a bite to eat."

He winked at Catherine, who winked back.

Vincent refrained from laughing and bent his head to one side, looking at her with all his love, before leaving with Father.

"Here, sit down, Vincent, you look exhausted." Father made him sit before preparing the tea and some food. By the time he came back from the kitchen area, Vincent was asleep.

Father sat and watched the sleeping figure in front of him and his heart beat faster as he thought of the times they had shared to finally reach this present stage. He shook his head and removed his glasses as he contemplated being a grandfather.

Catherine was his son's life. If anything were ever to happen to her, he was sure Vincent would die of a broken heart. Now! Now they had proved him wrong yet again. Never in all Vincent's lifetime had he dared think about a relationship, let alone a physical one, with such a beautiful, loving woman like Catherine. He smiled to himself, remembering her words.

"If our child is Vincent's double, I will be just as happy, Father. All that matters is that it is a part of us, part of our love and male or female, it's not of importance. We will love it always."

God! I will never be able to understand the strength of their love; their bond, it's just beyond anything I've ever come across!

"Father!" Vincent gently held his hand. "Your thoughts have taken you." He lifted the tea pot. "I've made fresh."

"What? Vincent? But you were asleep, how - ?"

"You nodded off too, Father." He smiled over his cup. "We were both extremely tired."

"Yes, it seems so." He stretched to ease the nagging pain in his hip. "How's Catherine?"

"Much better, Mary says and asking for our son." He beamed with pride at the words. "Is she strong enough yet? That fever had her pretty well drained." He shifted to his other side in the chair and was about to speak when Patrick came down the stairs.

"She's asleep again. I just checked, but the fever has gone," and he clapped Vincent's shoulder as he passed him.

"Good." Vincent rose from behind the desk. "If you'll excuse me, I'm going to visit the nursery," and nodding to the two men, he left.

Vincent just stood there, watching the sleeping child, taking in his every feature. Truly beautiful and so like them both, the balance between them had been shared within this child and Vincent knew they had a future like no other ahead of them.

Slowly he stirred and as he opened his tiny eyes, Vincent lifted him and cradled him before wrapping his shawl around him and heading for Catherine.

* * *

Catherine reached for her diary and glancing at the sleeping child, she started to fill the empty pages. The words flowed and she was nearly complete when Vincent came through the balcony doors.

She was out of her chair and in his arms in one easy movement. They clung to each other before he bent and kissed her.

"How long do we have?"

"Not long. Father and the others are getting ready."

"I'll get ready then," and with that she turned and went for a quick shower. By the time she had dried her hair and Vincent had put a fresh plaster on her shoulder, she was soon ready. "Is he awake?" She watched Vincent lean over the cot.

"No." He turned to her. "You're beautiful!"

She was wearing a dress of cream cashmere with a cream jacket embroidered with red and white roses across the yolk.

"Thank you."

"Catherine, before we leave I have to tell you something." He looked at the cot and then back to her. "The naming ceremony tonight; I had thought - well I was wondering - "

"Vincent, what's on your mind? It's not like you to be stuck for words!" She teased him a little, but was intrigued.

"I'm sorry, Catherine. Finding the right words is somehow - " he couldn't continue so he reached into his belt and took out the tiny box he had nursed for the last three weeks.

Watching him, Catherine could feel his beating heart and the surge of love coming from him.

"What, Vincent, what is it?" She was speaking so softly and lovingly he had to look at her.

Taking in a deep breath, he slowly opened the box as he spoke. "Catherine, I'm trying to ask you if you would do me the honour of becoming my wife." Handing over the small box, he saw and felt such an onflow of love, it knocked him back with its force.

"Oh God, Vincent! It's so beautiful," and turning it in her fingers, she reached for him, tears threatening. "Yes, the answer is yes. I'll marry you!"

He pulled her into his arms and a loving embrace that sealed their decision there and then. The sound of baby Jacob waking, caused them to part and going to the cot, Vincent lifted his son as Catherine collected the carry-cot, for the trip Below.

"Vincent, tonight, have you planned a double ceremony?" She looked up at him as she tucked in the sides of the carry-cot.

He looked rather sheepish and with head bent to the side, a grin slowly crept over his face.

She put her arms around his neck and kissed him tenderly. "What took you so long?" She bent her head to the side as she looked into his blue, magnificent eyes.

He laughed with ease at her statement and squeezed her. "If you only knew!"

Then they left for Below, and the start of a life-long union that would be full of mysteries and adventures beyond anything they had yet shared.

* * *

Part Three

A PROMISE OF NEW BEGINNINGS

Jenny knelt on the floor as she attempted to replace Jacob's nappy. He seemed to be well aware that she was no expert and was doing his utmost to avoid the side tapes being sealed.

Catherine was watching this activity as she spoke to Nancy on the phone. Smiling she had to control the laughter bubbling inside.

"Got ya!" and Jenny raised her hands in triumph as Jacob laughed with her.

"Gotta go, Nancy," Catherine laughed at the phone. "My assistant is in need of a coffee. Yeah, may be next week." She nodded. "Okay, Friday, I'll tell her, bye!"

Replacing the phone, she fell on her knees to join the two comedians on the floor. Jacob's baby-blue eyes twinkled at his mother as if he knew exactly what he had done.

"That child has been here before!" Jenny's statement made both mother and son laugh.

"Oh Cathy!" Jenny collapsed onto the couch. "These days with you and your family, they have become very special to me."

A long, feeling sigh escaped as Cathy sat down beside her and they watched the wriggling antics of this small baby lying in front of them.

"You and Vincent must have suffered so much over the last few years, yet now - " she lowered her gaze to Jacob, " - now you have been rewarded with life's special gift."

Catherine took her hand. "Jenny, you helped us in your own way! You were there when I needed you. You're our friend. A special friend and we love you."

She squeezed Cathy's hand. "How's Nancy?"

"Great, she's coming down on Friday. So she wants us to meet for lunch."

"That'll be a laugh, the three of us let loose!" She sniggered. "May be dangerous would be a better word!"

And the two friends recalled some of the adventures they had shared.

"Oh Cath, I had better go. I've some proof reading to do for tomorrow." Jenny bent and kissed Jacob, who by now was trying to put his whole fist into his mouth. "Don't you ever feed that child?"

Lifting her son, Catherine went to the door with her.

"See you on Friday."

"Give me a call first," and touching Jacob's cheek with her finger she turned and opened the door.

"Eeek!" Jenny was taken by surprise, as standing in front of her was a man poised to knock on the door she had just opened.

"Elliot!" Cathy couldn't believe her eyes. "What? What are you doing here?"

He looked from Jenny to Cathy, to Jacob and back to Cathy.

"Hi! Ah, can I talk to you, Cathy?" He looked at the baby in her arms again, a slight frown creasing his brow.

"Sure! You remember Jenny, don't you?"

She nodded to her friend, who said, "Hi and good bye!" as she squeezed past Elliot to head for the lift.

Cathy shouted, "See you Friday!" and turned to Elliot. "Come on in." Closing the door she shifted Jacob to her other hip before speaking again.

"Well! What brings you here, Elliot?" She motioned him to sit on the small sofa. "I've not seen you for well over a year, what have you been up to all this time?" She smiled at him but noticed he seemed far from happy.

"The baby, is it yours?"

"Yes, he's mine! Meet Jacob," and he could feel the love in her voice. Then she kissed him and cuddled him close before going for his bottle. Coming back through she sat across from Elliot and lay Jacob back to feed him.

"You're married?" he asked.

"Yes." She gave him a warm smile. "And I am extremely happy."

"You certainly look it. Who's the lucky guy? Do I know him?" He was going through the small talk with some effort so Cathy decided to step up the pace of things. Besides, Vincent would be home soon.

"No, Elliot, you don't know him." Then she looked straight at him. "I hear you have had someone in your life ... Jacqui was it? Are you still an item, are you happy?"

At last a smile crept across his good looking features revealing the dimples within his beard. He nodded.

"Cathy, I never thought I would get over you, but you taught me things that I am only now beginning to understand and yes, I am happy."

"I am pleased for you, Elliot." She lifted Jacob over her shoulder and rubbed his back.

"Now, why are you here?"

Slowly and with a little effort, Elliot uncoiled legs and body from his seat and paced the room, before turning to face her again.

"I have been offered a block of buildings that the council want renovations and some rebuilding work done on." He rubbed his hand through his hair and down the back of his neck. "For me, it's nothing more than an ideal publicity exercise. I don't normally consider these small non-profit making ventures." He turned back to her. "You know me, Cathy, but I would like to think I have changed a little!"

"Because of Jacqui?"

"Yes, but mainly you." He sighed. "I'm trying, Cathy, the only thing is I can't do it overnight." He went to the patio doors and looked out.

Jacob had fallen asleep so Cathy took him through to his cot, then went to the kitchen and put on the kettle.

"Elliot, where is this leading to?" She looked over her shoulder as she poured them coffee.

"Cathy, the buildings I'm talking about are in the block where your friend, Patrick Collins, has his surgery." He sighed as he came from the balcony.

"How did you know I knew Patrick?"

He smiled and gave her a look she knew only too well.

"Yeah, okay, silly question!" She put her cup back down on the table and looked up at him from under her falling hair. "Just what do you think I can do for you, Elliot? You know how I feel and you must be aware that Patrick's views will be the same."

His hands up in protest, he tried to calm her. "Cathy, I'm only here to warn you, not confront you." He shook his head. "I don't even know if I'll take it on yet, but I do know that there is someone waiting on the sidelines for me to say no and what they might do to get what they want, I have no idea."

"Who?" She turned on him.

"I'm sorry, I don't know, Cathy."

"Can we find out?"

"I'm not sure." He shoved his hands deep into his pockets. "The council is not forthcoming over this but - " he shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Okay, Elliot, okay." Cathy came towards him as she let out a long sigh. "Let me see what I can find out."

"Look Cathy," Elliot lifted his hands to rest them on her arms. "I think we should try and work on this together. Somehow I have a bad feeling about the whole deal."

She looked at him and saw a flicker of the old, but felt the urgency of a new and willing, Elliot. A smile spread across her face and she nodded in agreement.

"You know Cathy, if I go ahead with this, I promise there will be no backlash, no profit-making gimmicks, just rebuilding and upgrading. So your friend will have nothing to worry about."

She refilled their cups and sat opposite him before asking more questions. "Elliot, you seem concerned more about this other party, why? Have you been having problems with some of your other projects?"

Replacing his cup on the table he ran his hand through his hair as he leaned back on her 'dinky' couch. Catherine noted how good-looking he was with his legs stretched out in front of him; his beard trimmed and shaped, with his longish hair waving down over his collar. Jacqui's a lucky girl! Her heart jumped at the thought of them together, but only for a second and she knew they would

always have a deep-hidden feeling between each other. They accepted that now and would always be there for each other.

"Cathy, two of my recent building contracts have been hit by 'Gremlins'! I don't mean little things; I'm talking about big money and big hold ups, causing me to lose a great deal over them." He leaned forward and clasping his hands together he dropped his head to lean on them. "The thing is, Cathy, with all my staff, my contacts, I can't find out who's behind it all." A deep sigh escaped as he lifted his gaze to hers. "And I need your help!"

She leaned back and closed her eyes, knowing there was always trouble when she was involved with Elliot. Smiling, she thought of Vincent and how he would react!

"The thing is, Cathy, I didn't know you were married, with a baby. Do you still work at the DA's?"

"Yes, I'm there part-time, but I'm still working with Joe." She pulled herself up from the couch and pushing her hair back behind her ear she slowly turned to face him. "Okay, Elliot, I'll see what we can do."

"Oh! thanks, Cathy. I hoped you would, but Jacqui knew you would."

"Jacqui?"

"Yes. She seems to know you as well as I do." He lowered his head, slightly embarrassed.

"Elliot, why don't you and Jacqui meet me for a meal soon. I think it's time we got together." She smiled at him, knowing somehow that they were going to get along.

"Cathy, you're amazing," and with his dimple smile and sparkling eyes, he bent and kissed her on the lips. A fleeting kiss of a very special friend and now there was nothing to fear between them. They both had a love of their own and their friendship did not jeopardize this in any way.

"Tell me, when will I meet your husband?" He lifted his coat as he headed for the door.

"Vincent. His name is Vincent and maybe soon, Elliot. He's very busy."

"Not that busy." He grinned as he nodded towards the baby.

And they were laughing as they said good bye.

"I'll phone."

"Okay, Elliot."

He disappeared into the lift. Shutting the door with her back, she grinned as she headed for the bedroom. Vincent had been waiting on the balcony for about ten minutes before Elliot left and Cathy had been hard pushed not to make a move, but now she ran to him and his open arms.

"I turn my back for a few hours and you have another man here, Catherine, really!"

They shared the joke as they fell back on the bed and hugging each other they just lay and snuggled together for a while.

"Vincent?"

"Hmmm?"

"Elliot needs my help." She shifted so she could look into his sapphire eyes.

"I know," he sighed and placed a kiss on her nose. "Tell me."

So Catherine relayed the conversation she had had with Elliot and finished with a big sigh.

"You have to do it, Catherine," Vincent spoke after great thought. "He needs your help."

"Oh, I don't know, Vincent," she turned her face to his. "Every time we get involved with Elliot, there are side effects."

He smiled down at her before releasing his hold and going over to Jacob's cot. Their son was wide awake and lifted his arms as soon as his father came near. Lifting the active bundle, he carried him over to his mother and sat down with his arm around her.

"Catherine, I feel now that, perhaps he knows that you don't have romantic notions towards him," he sniggered. "Besides, you are a respectable married mother, now."

Kissing Jacob before changing him, she smiled at Vincent. He had seen Elliot kiss her earlier and he must have been aware of her mixed feelings, but their love was now beyond the disturbing emotions Vincent used to go through every time she was in Elliot's company. They had finally overcome all his misguided ideas and worries over what they could and couldn't do. Together they had journeyed to the limits of love and hope, where now there was a future; a real future and not a dream.

Jacob was placed in the middle of the bed as Catherine stretched and leaned over her husband, showering him in kisses.

"I love you."

Pulling her nearer, he returned her advances. "We know," and he reached out to catch Jacob's chubby hand.

After a little time shared with their son, Vincent went to shower as Catherine fed Jacob and prepared something for them to eat. She was well-organised by the time Vincent came through looking like something from a fairy tale. She caught her breath and he placed his arms around her waist, pulling her to him.

"Catherine, I must be the most fortunate person on this earth," and they lingered over a kiss before Jacob broke the spell, demanding attention of his own.

Mummy and Daddy were always forgetting him, it seemed. He sighed as if to say, *If only I was Below, at least I would get a little more attention!*

"Vincent, I think may be your son feels a little neglected." She lifted the smiling baby. "Take him through and read to him. I'll put our supper on a tray."

Taking him from her, he kissed his cheek and was promptly repaid by having his hair pulled.

"Ow!"

Catherine looked over her shoulder and grinned. *I think Jen was right. He has been here before!*

* * *

"Busy?" Joe stuck his head through the door.

"Yeah! But come in anyway."

"What's up?" He glanced at the mound of papers surrounding her. "You don't have anything big on right now?"

"I didn't, but I had a visit from Elliot Burch and ..." She threw her hands in the air and took a look at Joe, who was speechless.

"You're kidding!"

"Nope."

"So, fill me in," and he perched himself on the end of her desk, getting up half way through the explanation to get two cups of coffee.

"So now, Joe, what? I'm getting nothing but dead ends." She looked at him over her cup. "Any ideas?"

He let out a deep sigh. "Radcliffe, I don't know about this, it's got undertones. It always has when Burch is concerned!"

"Hold on, Joe." She pushed back on her chair. "I think he's changed and I wouldn't be helping him if I thought he wasn't genuine in this."

"Okay, may be you're right. Come to think of it he's been having some problems recently."

"Over his buildings?"

"Yeah. Reports say he's lost money on his last two efforts."

"He told me," she leaned forward on her desk. "Joe, I've got a gut feeling about this one. Nothing is coming together, it's as if we were being watched and manipulated."

"Cathy, I wonder if this has any connection to the release of Chad Everet? Wasn't it Elliot's building he had his night club in?"

"Everet is out already?" Cathy went to the window as she watched Joe.

"'Fraid so!" He came round the desk to stand beside her. "And guess who else is due for release this month?"

"Johnson?"

"Right again."

"God Joe, how do they do it?" She opened up the blind slats and looked out at the cloudy sky.

"Beats me, Radcliffe."

They were silent for some time, both deep in thought.

"Which one?"

Joe snapped back to face her. "Which one, who?"

"Which Johnson?"

"Oh! It's Syd - Peter Johnson, the Australian connection."

Coming back to sit at her desk she lowered herself slowly into her revolving chair. "Do you think, because Elliot owned the building they have made a false connection in his being involved in the break up of their little drug ring?"

"Could be, but Everet's not capable of the brain work involved in this cover up."

"So maybe we made a mistake, Joe. May be Johnson wasn't the top man." She was sparkling again.

"What if the man at the top is still sitting pretty in Australia?"

"That would explain a lot of things, Radcliffe, and we have no idea of identification." He turned to the door. "Get the files back up, Cath. Go through everything and get Rita in here to help. Let's see if we've missed something."

"Okay." Sighing, she smiled. "And thanks, Joe."

"Hey," he lifted his hands out towards her, "I've got to keep you busy, right?"

* * *

Catherine went towards the restaurant where she was to meet Elliot and Jacqui. At least there was some news to give him over this problem they were having. With tabs on Johnson and Everet, they had been seen meeting secretly a few times and with a third party. They suspected the third party was the one behind the whole business going right back to when Patrick first arrived on the scene. It also looked as if they thought Elliot was involved in their downfall and had decided to make life hell for him as a reprisal; warning him off and perhaps preparing themselves for a new venture.

Taking a deep breath, the waiter took her to Elliot's table and she smiled as he rose to meet her. Hand outstretched she shook his and turned to meet his companion.

"Cathy, meet Jacqui." He beamed as he spoke and she felt a slight twinge, spotting the way they glanced at each other.

"I'm delighted to meet you at last." Jacqui was extremely attractive; tall and looked like she was more than capable of taking care of herself.

"Me too," and so she was.

"Shall I order?" Elliot asked, looking from one to the other and they both nodded their approval.

"Cathy, any news for me?" he asked as he poured the wine.

So the conversation for the first part of the meal consisted of Catherine bringing him up to date.

"Well, you've got more information than I did!"

"Cathy," Jacqui caught her attention. "Elliot has something to tell you, something he should have told you before, but was too ... shall we say ... shy." The two had clicked from the first and were very much at ease with each other. It pleased her that she liked Jacqui so much and she had thoughts developing that may be one day, maybe they could meet Vincent.

"What, Elliot, have you kept from me now?" She let a smile creep over her face.

"I'm sorry, I should have told you the night I came to your apartment, but I was taken by surprise with the turn of events and I - well ... " he lifted his hand in a hopeless gesture.

"Elliot! Tell her for God's sake or we'll be here all night!" Jacqui winked at Cathy, knowing he was hedging.

"That building you and Peter purchased for Patrick ... I owned it." He lowered his gaze.

"You! But we - "

"He had left it in the hands of his lawyer while we were away," Jacqui explained. "And you didn't need to know anyway, as long as the deal was cash." She put her hand on top of Cathy's. "I thought you should know."

"Thanks, Jacqui, it could help tie up one or two loose ends." She smiled at them both. "Joe's worried there could be some force used, as a final warning, so promise me you'll take care."

"Cathy, I have men everywhere, don't worry," and Elliot's dimples jumped out at them as he gave out his widest smile.

"Look, I have to go I'm afraid; collect Jacob from the babysitter, but we must do this again soon." She turned to Jacqui. "Can we lunch some time?"

"Yes, I'd like that."

"Okay, call me."

"I will, Cathy, thanks," and they squeezed hands as she rose to leave.

"Oh, Cath," Elliot helped her on with her jacket. "Can we meet at the council site, with Patrick and I'll show you the plans I have."

"You're going ahead?"

"Yes, I am. Do you mind?"

"Not if you do as you promised."

"Oh, he will," Jacqui joined in. "Don't worry!"

"Great! When?"

"How about the day after tomorrow?"

She thought about it then remembered an appointment with Peter. "No good for me, how about tomorrow? Is that too soon for you?"

"No, I can fit it in."

"So can I." Once more, Jacqui was not going to be left out. "Why not?" She looked at Elliot, then at Cathy who said:

"Why not, indeed," and they decided on eleven o'clock at Patrick's surgery.

"Until tomorrow."

"Night, Cathy."

"Thanks for the meal."

"Next time, you'll bring Vincent." Elliot gave her that look again and she just smiled and nodded at them both.

* * *

Vincent was waiting for her in their chamber. Jacob was in the nursery with Mary so as to give them some time alone.

"How was it?" He kissed her head as she hugged him close.

"She's lovely, Vincent. I really like her."

"Good," and they kissed before she told him all that happened. "Take great care, Catherine." Vincent was concerned. "You were hurt before when involved with Everet and Johnson."

"I know, but so far I'm not that close into the investigation yet." She smiled and gently traced his face with her hand. "But I promised no more risks, you know that."

"Hmmm." He knew her too well.

The rest of the night was nothing less than an overpowering mixture of joy, happiness and outstanding love. A bonded love that they alone shared and treasured beyond all else and there was nothing - now - that would cause her to put it at risk.

Contented and happy they drifted into a deep, sound sleep, arms entwined, never wanting to be parted.

* * *

Catherine woke early so she could spend time with Vincent and Jacob before going Above. She had decided to phone Joe and tell him she would be going straight to her meeting with Elliot, then carry on to the office afterwards.

Vincent walked with her to the basement entrance and bending to kiss good bye, Catherine could feel his worry.

"What, Vincent? What troubles you?" She caressed his cheek as he let out a long deep sigh.

"Catherine, I have deep feelings about today. I can't explain it but there are moments when I have these visions." He turned from her and leaned against the tunnel wall, lowering his head, afraid to meet her eyes.

"Vincent, tell me!" She could feel how deep his emotions flowed.

He lifted his head and with eyes shut said, "What can I tell you? That you're in danger, and that I don't want you to go up today?" He shook his head. "Catherine, I can't tell you what I don't know, only what I - we - feel."

She came to his arms and nodded. She did feel it but had avoided mentioning it.

"I'll take care, Vincent. I'm sure we will be all right." She sighed. "It's daytime, I can't see them making a move then."

He pulled her close, he felt so helpless at these times, but Patrick's had an exit, he could be near and that would have to console him for now.

"I have to go." She kissed him with all her love. "I'll come and see you before I go to the office."

"Meet me below Patrick's." He tried to smile. "I'll be near the lift."

Nodding, she gave him a hug and climbed the ladder to the basement.

An hour later she had showered and dressed, all the time feeling a deep inner connection with Vincent. She had never known him to worry so. Was it Elliot? No! Elliot was not the enemy now, that was a reality they both knew. No, it was something they couldn't explain, so she would be careful. With these thoughts jumping inside her, she shut the door to her apartment and took the lift to the car park.

* * *

The traffic was murder, but eventually she arrived and Elliot and Jacqui were waiting for her. Patrick came and joined them once Cathy had parked the car.

"Sorry I'm late," she smiled at her new friend. "Hi, Jacqui."

"Traffic?"

"Yeah."

"Hi, Cathy," Patrick greeted her with a hug.

"What about your patients? How long can you spare?"

"It's okay, I've cancelled my appointments for this morning," he chuckled. "Jamie was glad of the time off, she's away to see Jacob."

"Right," Elliot spoke next. "I've got the plans laid out in the empty office downstairs, that way we will also have privacy," and he headed towards the building entrance.

"Elliot," Jacqui caught his arm. "You've left that amended drawing in the car."

"Damn it!" He threw his hands in the air. "Okay, you go on ahead, I won't be a minute," and he handed Jacqui the keys.

Chatting and laughing they entered the lobby and headed for the office they were going to use.

"I can see why they need to do this place up," Patrick commented. "I haven't been in this part before."

"Yuck," was Jacqui's only remark.

"Cathy," Patrick tapped her shoulder. "I think Elliot wants you."

They looked out of the window and saw him waving his arms towards her car.

"What?"

"I think your lights are on and he can't get in to turn them off," Patrick laughed, remembering the last time it happened and they had to get her towed home.

"Oh God, not again!"

"Here, I'll go," Patrick offered.

"No, it's okay, thanks, I'll go." And looking apologetically at Jacqui she pushed open the outside door.

At the same instant there was an explosion and Cathy was sent flying to the ground. Elliot came running towards her, then past her to where the flames were shooting out windows and doors.

"Jacqui! Jacqui!" he shouted at the top of his voice, not being able to see anything. Catherine pulled herself up, covered in blood, but knowing she had only slight cuts and was probably bruised from head to foot. She stared at the sight before her.

"God, no! Patrick! Jacqui!" She turned. "Elliot!"

He came back to her side. "I can't get in, I can't get near, Cathy!" he was crying; openly crying. The explosion brought back vivid memories.

Within minutes the fire brigade were on the scene and so were the police and paramedics. Cathy was shaking all over but wouldn't move until they found out if the others were alive and how badly they were hurt.

* * *

Vincent paced the tunnels below Patrick's building. Eleven o'clock, she should be there; must be running late. He did another round of the tunnel before he felt her near. So far, so good.

Time was passing too slowly for him. All he wanted was Catherine safe Below. He had been unsettled all morning and his feelings were more than strong now.

Turning quickly, he let out a roar, but it was never heard, the sound from the explosion drowned him out. He was thrown off balance and landed in a heap on the tunnel floor.

"Catherine!" He roared her name and avoiding the lift went towards the surgery via the alternative stairway. Opening the small vent he was forced backwards by the smoke. There was no way through. He fought the best he could but there was no way to avoid the onslaught of flames.

He retraced his steps to the tunnel and fell to his knees as he tried to catch his breath. All of a sudden he jerked his head upwards. *Catherine!* She was alive. He felt her. She was frightened and worried, but alive.

Crying her name he fell to the floor and thanked God. Then, just as quickly he regained his concentration and it dawned on him Patrick and the others could be hurt, so without another thought he ran to Father's chamber. They had to get some news; someone had to tell Jamie. *Oh no! Jamie!* He felt pain, he was so worried about Catherine, Jamie had slipped from his mind. He must hurry.

* * *

Joe came flying towards her. "Cathy, you all right?" He was worried as always.

"I'll be fine, but I'm afraid Patrick and Jacqui ... they ... " she trailed off as she started to cry.

"Joe," this was Elliot. He hardly recognised him, he was so untidy and had obviously not been away from the hospital since they had arrived there.

"Elliot! How - any news?" He waited for him to sit beside him.

"They have bad burns and glass cuts all over their bodies. Jacqui was lucky in that Patrick was thrown on top of her and protected her from a lot of the flying debris." He sighed from his boots.

"Patrick has a broken arm and his leg in question, but they are alive."

Jamie sat quietly, holding onto Cathy for support. Somehow, she didn't ask how, but Cathy had managed to get word Below. Through all that had happened; her own injuries, her thoughts were for the others and Vincent. Now they could do no more that night.

"Go home." The doctor was gentle but firm. "You can't stay here without doing yourselves more harm than good." He turned from Elliot to Cathy. "Please, Mrs Wells, take yourself and Jamie home and come back in the morning. We will phone if there is any change," then nodding at them all, turned and left.

"Come on, Cath, I'll take you and Jamie home." Joe helped them up and with one last look at Elliot, opened the door.

"Elliot," Cathy hugged him. "Go home too, we can meet here in the morning."

"I can't Cathy! I can't!"

"Then come back to my place."

With a look of relief and pain he made a move, then stopped. "No, Cath. thanks, but you're right, I had better go home." Placing a kiss on her cheek, he left by the stairs, needing time to himself.

"Come on you two," and Joe gently lead them away to his waiting car.

"Joe," Cathy turned to her friend. "Will he be all right? I mean they can't –"

"It's okay, Cath! Elliot has his own men and I have two uniforms on duty at his place." Joe's main concern was for this woman he was supporting in his arms. "What about Vincent?"

"Oh! He's been reached and is waiting for us at home."

She threw a glance at him, realising it must have seemed strange to him that Vincent wasn't at the hospital. *God! I'll have to tell him about Vincent, soon.*

Joe stood outside Cathy's apartment, but knew he wouldn't be asked in, so standing back, said, "Sure you're both okay?"

"We'll be fine now. Thanks Joe, for everything," and she gave him a hug before he turned to leave. "Joe," Cathy let Jamie in before carrying on. "Who knew we were going to the site today?"

Joe stopped in his tracks, he couldn't believe it, she was working her mind on overdrive. "Who knew?" She had lost him for a few seconds.

"Yes, who? All told?" Cathy leaned against the closed door, knowing Vincent was pacing about inside.

"Ah, well apart from us, Greg downtown and his team working on the case, why?" He frowned at her.

"I think we've got an insider, Joe. Someone's passing on information and it's not coming from us!" She sighed, suddenly worn out, feeling tired and sore.

"One of Greg's?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Think about it."

"Yeah, I will, Cathy - I will. Good night."

"Night, Joe." And she opened the door to fall into Vincent's arms.

* * *

Larry loosened his tie. *If I survive this one I'll be able to afford that sports car at last*, and he smiled to himself as he sipped his coffee and looked out over the skyline.

"Well!"

He jumped. He had been lost in his dreams and had not heard the door. "Hi, Boss."

"I told you, don't 'Boss' me, sonny!" and the rather large man eating a cigar, came around the just as large desk to sit in the swivel chair. "Now fill me in on this explosion."

The thin, weedy Everet came from the shadows and gave a run down on the events of the previous night.

"I'm afraid Elliot's not injured as we had planned."

"No." The voice was faint and unusual, coming from such a large frame. "But we got his woman and that will hurt him much more. Yes! Good work." He looked about him as if someone was missing.

"Where is he?"

"Johnson, I'm afraid won't be with us today, or any other day." Everet lit up a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "Seems his car's brakes failed at the wrong time."

"What a pity," and the big man smiled for the first time. "Okay, it's make or break time. Do we agree that Burch is now ready to be approached?"

"He still won't do it." Young Larry spoke this time.

"You think not?" Everet didn't like this young pup, he was too big for his boots.

"No, I don't!"

"Why not? We only have to let him know we were behind these attacks and I'm pretty sure he won't put his woman's life on the line."

The fat man swung around in the chair. "Don't forget he's only the decoy. If his boat is caught with drugs on board it will take the pressure off our boat and we will get that last shipment in." He pulled himself up and leaned on the desk. "We only need this last supply to get through so we can disappear and live in the luxury we planned."

"He won't give you the boat," Larry was pushing his luck and before he realised what had happened, he was on his back on the floor.

"Then it's your job to see he does!"

With that, the big man left and Everet turned to the limp body on the floor.

"And it had better be soon, that last delivery will be arriving on Wednesday," and he slammed the door behind him as he left.

"Yeah, sure," Larry spoke to the closed door. *Shit! I'm in it now!* he thought and brushed down his designer suit as he left the rented office for the last time.

* * *

Jamie didn't stay long at Catherine's, she wanted to be Below with Father and the others. She also knew they would tell her if there was any change, so an hour after they left the hospital she was Below amongst her family.

"Oh, God, Catherine!" Vincent held her to him with all his strength. "Never again, it's not going to happen again, Catherine!"

She knew he would react like this and she felt the same right now. Leave the office once and for all, but this was a one-off event. Would probably never happen again! But then there would be something, or someone else and it would start all over.

"I know, Vincent. I promised, but I had no idea these people were capable of what they did," and she pulled back far enough for them to kiss and show their love for each other.

"Catherine, please! You have Jacob too now and a family Below, that loves you as much as anyone could! You must consider this more than ever."

"I will, I promise."

"Good." And they clung to each other for a while longer until her body told her she was about to drop.

Vincent lifted her through to bed and gently lay beside her until she fell asleep. Not long after, Peter came to check on her and Vincent let him in.

"How is she?"

"What do you think, Peter!" Vincent's normally patient attitude was wearing thin.

"All right, Vincent, no need to get upset, she's going to be fine." He flipped through the file of notes he got from the hospital. "Everything is superficial with her, but she's going to have to be very quiet

and rest for at least two weeks." He smiled to himself as he prepared to pass on the other results. "Is she awake?"

Vincent sighed. "Yes, but she's tired," and he led him through. He had felt her stir as he spoke to Peter and knew she was annoyed he had come.

"Peter, what brings you here?"

"That's a nice welcome I must say!" and he smiled at her before planting a kiss on her brow.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean - "

"Shh, it's all right Cathy, I understand," and he sat beside her on the bed. "I wouldn't have bothered you tonight, but the hospital phoned me - "

"Patrick! Jacqui! What?" She sat upright.

"No, no, nothing like that. Relax, they are doing very well." He pushed her gently back down. "It's you, Cathy."

"Me? What do you mean?"

"Peter," Vincent came and held Catherine. "What is it?"

"Look, it's nothing to worry about, but I felt I should be the one to tell you." He grinned at them. "Cathy, Vincent, you are going to be parents - again!"

"What!" Catherine couldn't believe it, she had taken precautions, they had decided no more, not right away.

"But how, Catherine has been most careful," Vincent was worried for her.

"Perhaps, Vincent," Peter stood up and placed a hand on his shoulder, "You are beyond what we can provide!"

By now the shock had passed and was replaced with joy and happiness.

"Well, you have had your wish Vincent," Cathy looked at him with such love he caught his breath. "There is no way I can stay at work now."

"What's this! You planning a new life, Cathy?"

"After today, we were giving it a great deal of thought," and she smiled. "But now I have had my mind made up for me."

Vincent gently held her close and kissed her tenderly, letting the news of another child thrill him to his very being.

"Father, you had better tell him."

"Tomorrow."

"Well, I had better push off," Peter put his jacket on. "See you soon, Cathy."

"Good night, Peter and thank you for coming over."

He nodded to them and Vincent locked the door behind him before he and Cathy spent a night of sleeping and planning.

* * *

Joe turned sharply and stared at the man leaning over his desk. "No! No way! I can't do what you want," and he put both his hands on the desk to be at eye level with his opponent, who thumped his fist on the pile of files in front of him.

"Why the hell not?"

"Because it doesn't work that way!" Joe pulled himself back upright. "And without anything concrete to go on there isn't a damn thing you, me or the police can do!"

"Well at least keep her protected while she's in hospital," he was practically begging Joe to help him.

"What about your own little army? What happened to them when you needed them?" Joe's sarcastic remark hit home.

"That was uncalled for, Joe. If I had thought there was a risk I would have had my men covering her, you know that!" His voice could be heard in the outer office.

"Okay, okay." Joe held up his hands. "Look, I agree, until she's released from hospital there will be a twenty-four hour guard on her door, but that's it." He sat down in his chair with a thud, watching this man who he disliked with a great intensity. He made a habit of hurting people that cared for him and his concern for this woman was out of character. Yes, it made Joe slightly suspicious to say the very least.

"For now, that's all I ask." He adjusted his coat and reached for the door handle.

"Remember, anything you get comes to my desk. You're not to go off half-cocked on your own!" Joe pushed his chair back as he rose. "It's not a private war, others were hurt too, not just your friend." His voice had calmed slightly as he thought of Cathy and Patrick. It affected his visitor too and turning to face Joe, he could see the hurt in his grey eyes as he hung his head slightly before meeting Joe's gaze.

"She's not just a friend," he sighed deeply. "She's my wife!"

"Your wife?" Joe's mouth dropped open. He was not able to believe what he was hearing. "You're kidding me!"

A hint of a smile spread across this man's face, not completely visible because of his beard.

"Well, I'll be ...!" Joe came to stand beside him. "I'm sorry, I didn't know."

"It's okay," Elliot took the outstretched hand he was offered. "Not many people do. We have kept it as quiet as we could without making a fuss."

"Why? I thought you would have been all out for the publicity." Joe didn't mean it to sound quite that way, but it was out before he realised. "Oh, I - "

He held up his hand. "It's okay, Joe. You're right, but that was me a year ago, not the me, now," and with a nod of his head, he left Joe speechless behind him.

The phone rang and Joe jerked back to reality the best he could. "Yeah!"

"Hi, Joe."

"Hi, Cathy." He settled into his seat and smiled at the voice. "You okay? No delayed reactions of any kind?"

"No. I'm going to be fine. I couldn't face the hospital, so we phoned and both Jacqui and Patrick are out of intensive care." She sounded very tired.

"That's good news." He leant forward. "Did you know they were married?"

"Who?"

"Burch and that Jacqui lady."

"No! I had no idea! Huh! He never mentioned it."

"That's one up to me, Radcliffe!" and he gloated at the phone. "Listen, about your hunch, Cathy."

"Yeah?"

"Well, I got hold of Greg last night and we went over events, going right back," he sounded pleased - and was. "It seems the lad, Larry, volunteered for anything connected to Elliot. So we went through him with a fine tooth comb, discovering he is living well above the income of a rookie cop!"

"You think it's him?"

"We took him in late last night. I'm waiting to hear from Greg now."

"Great, Joe! Keep me informed." She sighed. "I won't be back for some time."

"I know. Take as much time as you need."

"I don't mean that, Joe," she hesitated. "I'm thinking of leaving altogether."

There was a long pause.

"Joe, you there? Joe!"

"Yeah, Cathy. I'm still here." He sounded hurt. "You sure? I mean, have you gone over this with Vincent?"

"Yes! And that's another thing. Can you come over Saturday night? Vincent would like to meet you." She was smiling, he could tell.

"Saturday? Your place?" He took in a deep breath. "Yeah, I can make it."

"Good, see you then."

"Okay, but I'll let you know if anything happens in-between."

"Thanks, bye."

"Bye, Radcliffe," and he stared at the phone as its tone buzzed in his hand.

* * *

"Thanks, Peter," and Cathy replaced the phone. "Well," she turned to Vincent. "Jacqui can go home tomorrow."

"Good."

"Patrick's safe Below and getting plenty of care and attention," she sighed. "Jacqui and Elliot only have each other."

"Catherine, they are in love. They don't need more right now," and he smiled as he pulled her into his arms.

"How are you feeling today? It's only been a few days, you should take more care."

"Vincent, you have spent these last four days here with me, at great risk, no wonder I have healed so quickly. Your love and care has healed the injuries I had, no doctor could do what you have achieved." She put her arms around his neck and lowering his head, they were lost in a kiss so filled with love it overpowered even these two. "Oh Vincent, I love you."

"I can feel it more every day. Yet, you still worry about this case!"

"I know, I just want these people found."

"But Joe told you that Larry gave them the information they needed," he sighed. Even Elliot is working with ... " His voice trailed off as he realised that tonight was the night Elliot was to meet the rest of the gang. It should have been two nights ago, but it had been changed after Johnson's body was found sooner than they had hoped for.

Turning in his arms, Catherine jumped when the phone rang. Vincent lifted it. "Hello."

"It's Joe here, that you, Vincent?"

"Yes."

"Hi, how you doin'?"

"I'm well, thank you. Have you news?"

Joe was taking a little time to coordinate to this voice. "Oh! Yeah. Tell Cathy everything went okay. We got the men and ... " he paused. "Elliot's okay too."

Vincent smiled. Catherine had told him Joe's views on Elliot. Good or bad, he didn't like him much, but his voice betrayed the fact that he was pleased he was all right.

"Thank you for letting us know. Catherine has been worried."

"Yeah! Well I thought she would be," he cleared his throat, feeling uncomfortable speaking to this man who was Cathy's husband.

"Until tomorrow, then," Vincent spoke, to break the elongated pause.

"Sure. 'til tomorrow, Vincent," and the line went dead.

"He seemed ... nervous."

"I bet he was," and Catherine had to laugh; not only at the thought of Joe, but watching Vincent had been a treat in itself. "How did it go?"

"Everything is over, Catherine. Everet and the other man have been caught."

"And Elliot?"

"He is safe, Catherine." Slowly bending his head to one side he watched her face.

"Thank God! At last, it's over!" and she became weak with the relief.

Vincent lay her down on the couch and went through for Jacob. Today was the first day they had him in the apartment since Catherine had been injured. He lay him beside her and grabbing a book from the table, she began to read to her son as Vincent went and made tea.

* * *

Joe was looking around the apartment. Any excuse would do, he thought, but what? For over two years he had been plagued by Cathy's mystery man and now they wanted to get together he was scared.

He loved Cathy, well, in a special kind of friendly love and always felt her sadness or worry when at the office. If she leaves, it sure as hell won't be the same! Changing out of his sloppy jumper and looking at his near empty wardrobe he was surprised when the doorbell rang.

"Who is it?" he asked as he opened the door.

"Hi, Joe!" She smiled warmly at him.

"Jenny! hi, come on in." He seemed relieved to see her. "What brings you over?"

"Well, I'm on my way to Cath's. I thought you could keep me company seeing as you're invited too," she grinned.

"Radcliffe's behind this," he grinned back. "She knew I would be having second thoughts!"

"You mean you don't find the prospect of going out with me a challenge?" Jenny laughed at him.

"Okay," he wasn't going to be out done. "How about we go out for something to eat first?"

"Great, Joe, I'm starved."

Joe raised his eyes skywards. She was always hungry. "Right, give me five minutes."

"Five minutes? Huh! What are you planning to wear?"

"Oh, very funny!" and with that banged the bedroom door behind him.

Joe had to admit, Jenny was always an easy person to be with and they had become friends, thanks to Cathy, but maybe he should see her more. Yeah! She was good company; he'd think about it if he survived tonight!

Half an hour later he was ready and finding Jenny munching an apple, he decided to leave straight away before she ate him out of house and home!

* * *

Vincent and Catherine nearly bumped into each other as he paced and she was busy getting Jacob ready for bed.

"Here," Catherine gave him to Vincent who was worried about tonight. "Try and do something constructive." She smiled as he nearly lost another handful of his hair.

"Ouch!" He bent his head. "That was not a good move, Jacob," and he kissed him, as Jacob knew he would.

Thank goodness, Cathy sighed. Now I can get myself ready!

Vincent was showered and ready; dressed in light coloured cords with a beautiful crew neck cream top that Cathy had bought for him that morning. With his hair cascading over his shoulders and his blue lagoon eyes, he was the most beautiful sight she could wish to see. God! How she loved him.

"Catherine, if you don't go for your shower now, I won't be able to answer for my actions," and he lifted his gaze from their son with a look that spoke a thousand words.

"I'm going, I'm going," she said, realising that she had stirred all his emotions with her wandering thoughts. *You'll have to watch yourself, Cathy!* she thought, smiling to herself as the water soothed the tender bruised body.

She was lucky; there had been no broken bones; plenty of cuts and bruises, but nothing to the suffering of Patrick and Jacqui. She shut her eyes and sighed deeply. Thank heavens they were on the mend. Jamie was fussing over Patrick to his great delight, as was Elliot to Jacqui.

Elliot was still going to go ahead with the new buildings, so by the time Patrick would be better, the work should be well on the way to completion.

"Catherine, it's getting late," Vincent didn't want to be caught alone when the doorbell went!

"Just coming!" and she flew from the shower, dried her hair and was dressed in twenty minutes flat. "Sorry, I didn't mean to leave you alone so long," and she reached for him to give him a hug and a fleeting kiss before checking things in the kitchen. She couldn't cope with a meal, but there were some snacks to go with the wine and coffee.

Ready at last, they relaxed in front of the fire with Jacob, enjoying this family time together. He was growing so fast and had such beautiful features, Catherine couldn't believe how lucky she was. Two beautiful men in her life.

"A girl would be nice," Vincent's soft distant tones caused her to turn to him.

"Vincent?"

He smiled. "A girl," and he lowered his hand to her stomach.

"Oh! You had me worried for a minute." She curled into him as she lifted Jacob into their arms. Stretched out, so relaxed and at ease they were caught off guard when the doorbell broke the moment.

Vincent was in the bedroom in three strides and Catherine went to open the door with Jacob on her good hip.

"Jenny! Joe! Come on in." She smiled at them. "You look like you've had fun."

"We did." Joe kissed her cheek and rubbed Jacob with his finger.

"Give him to me." Jen dived for Jacob and the child started to laugh right away.

"He sure knows you, okay," and Joe couldn't help notice how much Jen was enjoying this close contact with Jacob.

"Make yourself at home, Joe."

"Still got the 'dinky couch' I see," but he also noticed there was a larger, single chair too. Vincent's? Catherine turned to speak over her shoulder as she went for the wine and glasses. "You two go for a meal?"

"Yeah," Jenny beamed. "It was great." She went and sat beside Joe and bounced Jacob on her knee. Cathy came through with the wine and lifted her son to sit on the floor. She could feel Vincent's unrest. He was aware she had to break Joe in gently, but he was anxious about the whole thing. Would he cause Catherine to lose a good friend? How was he going to react? Then he smiled as he felt Catherine's love. She reassured him with her trust and he started to relax.

Sitting on the floor with Jacob, she faced her two friends and looking at Jen she took a deep breath and started to put things into perspective for Joe.

Jenny butted in here and there and Joe was amazed that she knew what she did. Finally, main explanations over, Cathy sat and waited for Joe's reaction.

"You mean this has been an ongoing thing since you were - " he sighed, " - since you joined the DA's?" His voice was quiet and controlled. This was not what he had expected and he was more confused than ever. "Jen, how did you cope with this?" He turned to her as Cathy left to get Vincent.

"It was easy, Joe. He's very special, they are both very special and I love them."

Catherine left Jacob with Jen and was now in the only place she wanted to be - Vincent's arms. She had felt all his turmoil and worry but his love came through stronger than ever and they let it flow between them. They kissed, a loving tender butterfly kiss, smiled and hand in hand, Cathy looked up at this extraordinary man.

"Ready?" she whispered.

"As I'll ever be." His velvet tones were calm as they opened the louvred bedroom doors.

Smiling, Jenny came over and planted a kiss on Vincent's cheek. "Hi, big boy."

"Hi, yourself."

"Joe," Cathy turned to hold his arm. "Meet Vincent." Pride showed itself like a radar.

He didn't move right away and they waited for him to take in this figure in front of him.

Slowly, Vincent lifted his hand and stretched it towards him.

"Joe, it's a pleasure to meet you at last."

The voice; it was the voice that connected and lifting his hand, he shook Vincent's, hardly noticing the hair covering it.

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"Excuse me," Vincent was slightly amused.

"Oh! Hey, I'm sorry," he went red. "You're just not the run of the mill husband!" and he let a grin spread over his face.

Vincent could feel the tension drain from Catherine and almost sighed with relief himself.

"I agree with Jenny, you are something special."

Vincent lowered his head slightly. "Thank you, Joe."

"Do you know I once told Cathy she needed somebody down to earth; solid," he laughed. "No wonder she reacted the way she did!"

Tension had gone out of the window, they sat and took wine and talked. Jenny and Cathy finally got Jacob to bed and made coffee. The whole evening was a success and it was late when Joe and Jenny left.

"Well, Vincent," they shook hands like old friends this time. "It has been an evening to remember and I look forward to seeing your 'other' home and be reassured, no one will know from me, about you or your family."

"We know that, Joe," he smiled. "We trusted you, that's why we felt you should be told."

He nodded to him, kissed Cathy and with his hand on Jenny's arm, he guided her to the lift. He wasn't ready for home yet.

"Fancy some coffee and conversation?" Jen asked going down.

"Is it that obvious?"

"I was unsettled too, to start with," she squeezed his arm. "Come on, we'll go to my place," and Joe once more nodded as they left the apartment building.

* * *

Climbing into bed beside Vincent was the most soothing feeling she could imagine. Nestling into his embrace, exhausted by the evening's activity, she buried herself into his chest, her arm around his waist, pulling him close.

"Hmm," Vincent sighed. "I've waited so long for this," and he turned slightly so as to kiss her and encase her with all his love.

"Oh, Vincent, I love you! I love you so much!"

"Shhh now." He kissed her nose. "We must rest," and slipping downwards they held each other as sleep spread over them and took them on a flight to future dreams.

Their love was something beyond explanation. What they had now and what was to be, could only bring more love and joy. Joys unequalled in dreams or hope and a future so full of happiness that there would never be words to describe any of it.

Catherine sighed and tightened her hold. He pulled her close. Even in sleep their bond held them together as one.

Whatever the hopes they may have had, there was always the promise of new beginnings!

The End